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7.

THE WORKS

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND JOSEPH HALL, D.D.

BISHOP OF EXETER AND AFTERWARDS OF NORWICH.

A NEW EDITION,

REVISED AND CORRECTED, WITH SOME ADDITIONS,

BY

PHILIP WYNTER, D.D.

PRESIDENT OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

VOL. II.

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CONTEMPLATIONS

UPON THE

PRINCIPAL PASSAGES

OF THE

HOLY STORY.

THE SIXTH VOLUME.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK XVIII.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JAMES, LORD HAY,[a]

BARON OF SALEY [OR SAWLEY], VISCOUNT DONCASTER, EARL OF CARLISLE, ONE OF THE LORDS OF HIS MAJESTY'S MOST HONOURABLE PRIVY COUNCIL.

Right Honourable,—I cannot but thus gratulate to you your happy return from your many and noble employments which have made you some years a stranger at home, and so renowned abroad, that all the better parts of Europe know and honour your name no less than if you had been born theirs; neither is any of them so savage as not to say, when they hear mention of your worth, that *Virtue is a thousand escutcheons.*

If now your short breathing-time may allow your lordship the freedom of quiet and holy thoughts, cast your eyes upon Israel and Judah; upon the kings and prophets of both, in such beneficial variety, as profane history shall promise in vain. Your lordship shall see Rehoboam following Solomon in nothing but his seat and his fall; as much more wilful than his father, as less wise; all head, no heart; losing those ten tribes with a churlish breath, whom he would, and might not, recover with blood: Jeroboam as crafty as wicked; plotting a revolt, creating a religion to his state, marrying Israelites to make subjects, branded in his name, smitten in his hand, in his loins. You shall see a faithful messenger of God, after miraculous proof of his courage, fidelity, power, good-nature, paying dear for a little circumstance of credulous disobedience; the lion is sent to call for his blood, as the price of his forbidden harbour. You shall see the blind prophet descrying the disguise of a queen, the judgment of the king, the removal of a prince too good for Jeroboam's heir. You shall see the right stock of royal succession flourishing in Asa, while that true heir of David, though not without some blemishes of infirmity, inherits a perfect heart; purges his kingdom of sodomy, of idolatry; not balking sin even where he honoured nature. You shall see the wonder of prophets, Elijah, opening and shutting heaven as his private chest; catered for by the ravens, nor less miraculously catering for the Sareptan; contesting with Ahab; confronting the Baalites; speaking both fire and water from heaven in one evening; meekly lacqueying his sovereign; weakly flying from Jezebel; fed

[a] [See Dedication prefixed to Book IV.]

supernaturally by angels; hid in the rock of Horeb; confirmed by those dreadful apparitions that had confounded some other; casting his mantle upon his homely successor, and, by the touch of that garment, turning him from a ploughman to a prophet. But what do I withhold your lordship in the bare heads of this ensuing discourse? In all these your piercing eyes shall easily see beyond mine, and make my thoughts but a station for a further discovery. Your lordship's observation hath studied men more than books; here it shall study God more than men: that of books hath made you full; that of men, judicious; this of God shall make you holy and happy: hitherto shall ever tend the wishes and endeavours of

Your lordship's humbly devoted in all faithful observance,

JOS. HALL.

REHOBOAM.—1 Kings xii; 2 Chronicles x.

WHO would not but have looked that seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines should have furnished Solomon's palace with choice of heirs, and have peopled Israel with royal issue? And now behold Solomon hath by all these but one son, and him by an Ammonitess. Many a poor man hath an house full of children by one wife, while this great king hath but one son by many housefuls of wives. Fertility is not from the means, but from the author. It was for Solomon that David sung of old; *Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward.* How oft doth God deny this heritage of heirs where he gives the largest heritage of lands; and gives most of these living possessions where he gives least of the dead; that his blessings may be acknowledged free unto both, entailed upon neither!

As the greatest persons cannot give themselves children, so the wisest cannot give their children wisdom. Was it not of Rehoboam that Solomon said, *I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet he shall rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and showed myself wise under the sun.* All Israel found that Solomon's wit was not propagated. Many a fool hath had a wiser son than this wisest father. Amongst many sons, it is no news to find some one defective; Solomon hath but one son,

and he no miracle of wisdom. God gives purposely so eminent an instance, to teach men to look up to heaven both for heirs and graces.

Solomon was both the king of Israel and the father of Rehoboam when he was scarce out of his childhood; Rehoboam enters into the kingdom at a ripe age; yet Solomon was the man, and Rehoboam the child. Age is no just measure of wisdom. There are beardless sages, and grayheaded children. Not the ancient are wise, but the wise is ancient.

Israel wanted not for thousands that were wiser than Rehoboam; yet because they knew him to be the son of Solomon, no man makes question of his government. In the case of succession into kingdoms, we may not look into the qualities of the person, but into the right.

So secure is Solomon of the people's fidelity to David's seed, that he follows not his father's example in setting his son by him in his own throne: here was no danger of a rivalry to enforce it, no eminency in the son to merit it; it sufficeth him to know that no bond can be surer than the natural allegiance of subjects.

I do not find that the following kings stood upon the confirmation of their people; but, as those that knew the way to their throne, ascended their steps without aid. As yet the sovereignty of David's house was green and unsettled; Israel therefore doth not now come to attend Rehoboam, but Rehoboam goes up to meet Israel.

They come not to his Jerusalem, but he goes to their Shechem: *To Shechem were all Israel come to make him king.* If loyalty drew them together, why not rather to Jerusalem? there the majesty of his father's temple, the magnificence of his palace, the very stones in those walls, besides the strength of his guard, had pleaded strongly for their subjection. Shechem had been many ways fatal, was every way incommodious. It is an infinite help or disadvantage that arises from circumstances. The very place puts Israel in mind of a rebellion. There Abimelech had raised up his treacherous usurpation over and against his brethren: there Gaal against Abimelech: there was Joseph sold by his brethren, as if the very soil had been stained with perfidiousness. The time is no less ill chosen. Rehoboam had ill counsel ere he bewrayed it; for had he speedily called up Israel before Jeroboam could have been sent for out of Egypt, he had found the way clear. A little delay may lose a great deal of opportunity.

What shall we say of both, but that misery is led in by infatuation?

Had not Israel been somewhat predisposed to a mutiny, they had never sent into Egypt for such a spokesman as Jeroboam; a fugitive, a traitor to Solomon. Long had that crafty conspirator lurked in a foreign court. The alliances of princes are not ever necessary bonds of friendship. The brother-in-law of Solomon harbours this snake in his bosom, and gives that heat which is repaid with a sting to the posterity of so near an ally. And now Solomon's death calls him back to his native soil. That Israel would entertain a rebel, it was an ill sign; worse yet, that they would countenance him; worst of all, that they would employ him. Nothing doth more bewray evil intentions than the choice of vicious agents. Those that mean well will not hazard either the success or credit of their actions upon offensive instruments. None but the sluttish will wipe their faces with foul clothes. Upright hearts would have said, as David did to God, so to his anointed: *Do not I hate them that hate thee? Yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred.* Jeroboam's head had been a fit present to have been tendered unto their new king, and now, instead thereof, they tender themselves to Jeroboam as the head of their faction.

Had not Rehoboam wanted spirits, he had first, after Solomon's example, done justice to his father's traitor, and then have treated of mercy towards his subjects.

The people soon found the weakness of their new sovereign, else they durst not have spoken to him by so obnoxious a tongue: *Thy father made our yoke grievous; make thou it lighter, and we will serve thee.*

Doubtless the crafty head of Jeroboam was in this suit, which his mouth uttered in the name of Israel. Nothing could have been more subtle; it seemed a promise, it was a threat. That which seemed a supplication was a complaint; humility was but a veil of discontentment; one hand held a paper, the other a sword. Had they said, "Free us from tributes," the capitulation had been gross, and strongly savouring of sedition; now they say, *Ease us,* they profess his power to impose and their willingness to yield; only craving favour in the weight of the imposition. If Rehoboam yield, he blemishes his father; if he deny, he endangers his kingdom: his wilfulness shall seem worthily to abandon his sceptre, if he stick at so reasonable a suit. Surely Israel came with a pur-

pose to cavil. Jeroboam had secretly troubled these waters that he might fish more gainfully: one malecontent is enough to embroil a whole kingdom.

How harshly must it needs sound in the ears of Rehoboam, that the first word he hears from his people is a querulous challenge of his father's government; *Thy father made our yoke grievous!*

For aught I see, the suggestion was not more spiteful than unjust. Where was the weight of this yoke, the toil of the services? Here were none of the turmoils of war; no trainings, marchings, encampings, entrenchings, watchings, minings, sieges, fortifications; none of that tedious world of work that attends hostility. Solomon had not his name for nought. All was calm during that long reign; and if they had paid dear for their peace, they had no cause to complain of an hard match. The warlike times of Saul and David had exhausted their blood together with their substance. What ingratitude was this, to cry out of ease! "Yea, but that peace brought forth costly and laborious buildings. God's house and the king's, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazar, Megiddo, and Gezer, the cities of store, the cities of defence, could not rise without many a shoulder." True; but not of any Israelites. The remainders of Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, were put to all the drudgery of these great works. The tasks of Israel were easy and ingenuous, free from servility, free from painfulness. "But the charge was theirs, whosesoever was the labour. The diet of so endless a retinue, the attendance of his seraglio, the purveyance for his forty thousand stables, the cost of his sacrifices, must needs weigh heavy." Certainly; if it had lain on none but his own. But wherefore went Solomon's navy every three years to Ophir? To what use served the six hundred threescore and six talents of gold that came in one year to his exchequer? Wherefore served the large tributes of foreign nations? How did he make silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, if the exactions were so pressive? The multitude is ever prone to pick quarrels with their governors; and whom they feared alive, to censure dead. The benefits of so quiet and happy a reign are passed over in silence, the grievances are recounted with clamour. Who can hope that merit or greatness can shield from obloquy when Solomon is traduced to his own loins?

The proposition of Israel puts Rehoboam to a deliberation; *Depart ye for three days, then come again to me.* I hear no other

word of his that argued wisdom. Not to give sudden resolutions in cases of importance was a point that might well beseem the son of Solomon. I wonder that he who had so much wit as to call for leisure in his answer should show so little wit in the improving of that leisure in the return of that answer.

Who cannot but hope well to see the gray heads of Solomon's secret council called to Rehoboam's cabinet? As councillors as ancient as Solomon's, they cannot choose but see the best, the safest course for their new sovereign. They had learned of their old master that *a soft answer appeaseth wrath;* wisely therefore do they advise him, *If thou wilt be a servant to this people this day, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever.*

It was an easy condition, with one mouthful of a breath to purchase an everlasting homage; with one gentle motion of his tongue to bind all people's hearts to his allegiance for ever. Yet, as if the motion had been unfit, a new council-table is called. Well might this people say, "What will not Rehoboam grudge us, if he think much to give good words for a kingdom?"

There is not more wisdom in taking variety of advice where the matter is doubtful, than folly when it is plain. The young heads are consulted. This very change argues weakness. Some reason might be pleaded for passing from the younger counsel to the aged, none for the contrary. Age brings experience, and it is a shame if with the ancient be not wisdom: youth is commonly rash, heady, insolent, ungoverned, wedded to will, led by humour, a rebel to reason, a subject to passion, fitter to execute than advise. Green wood is ever shrinking and warping, whereas the well seasoning holds a constant firmness.

Many a life, many a soul, many a flourishing state, hath been ruined by undisciplined monitors. Such were these of Rehoboam, whose great stomach tells them that this conditionating of subjects was no other than an affront to their new master, and suggests to them how unfit it is for majesty to brook so saucy a treaty, how requisite and princely to crush this presumption in the egg: as scorning therefore to be braved by the base vulgar, they put words of greatness and terror in their new prince; *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. My father made your yoke heavy, I will add to your yoke. My father hath chastised you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions.* The very words have stings.

Now must Israel needs think, "How cruel will this man's hand be when he thus draws blood with his tongue! Men are not wont to speak out their worst: who can endure the hopes of him that promiseth tyranny?" There can be no good use of an indefinite profession of rigour and severity. Fear is an unsafe guardian of any state, much less of an unsettled. Which was yet worse, not the sins of Israel were threatened nor their purses, but their persons; neither had they desired a remission of justice, but of exactions; and now they hear of nothing but burdens and scourges and scorpions.

Here was a prince and people well met. I do not find them sensible of aught save their own profit. They do not say, "Religion was corrupted in the shutting up of thy father's days. Idolatry found the free favour of priests and temples and sacrifices. Begin thy reign with God; purge the church; demolish those piles of abomination; abandon those idol-mongers; restore devotion to her purity." They are all for their penny, for their ease: he, on the other side, is all for his will, for an imperious sovereignty; without any regard either of their reformation or satisfaction. They were worthy of load that cared for nothing but their backs; and he worthy of such subjects who professed to affect their misery and torment.

Who would not but have looked any-whither for the cause of this evil rather than to heaven? yet the holy God challenges it to himself; *The cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying by Abijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam.* As sin is a punishment of sin, it is a part of justice. The Holy One of Israel doth not abhor to use even the grossest sins to his own just purposes: while our wills are free to our own choice, his decrees are as necessary as just. Israel had forsaken the Lord and worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and Chemosh and Milcom. God owes them and Solomon a whipping: the frowardness of Rehoboam shall pay it them. I see Jeroboam's plot, the people's insolence, the young men's misadvice, the prince's unreasonable austerity, meeting together, through the wise providence of the Almighty, unwittingly to accomplish his most just decree. All these might have done otherwise for any force that was offered to their will; all would no more do otherwise than if there had been no predetermination in heaven; that God may be magnified in his wisdom and justice, while man wittingly perisheth in his folly.

That three days' expectation had warmed these smoking Israel-

ites, and made them ready for a combustion. Upon so peremptory a resolution of rigour the flame bursts out, which all the waters of the well of Bethlehem could never quench. The furious multitude flies out into a desperate revolt: *What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David.*

How durst these seditious mouths mention David in defiance? One would have thought that very name had been able to have tempered their fury, and to have contained them within the limits of obedience. It was the father of Rehoboam and the son of David that had led Israel into idolatry: Solomon hath drawn contempt upon his father and upon the son. If Israel have cast off their God, is it marvel that they shake off his anointed? Irreligion is the way to disobedience. There can be no true subjection but out of conscience. They cannot make conscience of civil duties who make none of divine.

In vain shall Rehoboam hope to prevail by his officer when himself is rejected. The persons of princes carry in them characters of majesty: when their presence works not, how should that message? If Adoram solicit the people too late with good words, they answer him with stones. Nothing is more untractable and violent than an enraged multitude. It was time for Rehoboam to betake himself to his chariot: he saw those stones were thrown at him in his Adoram: as the messenger suffers for his master, so the master suffers in his messenger. Had Rehoboam been in Adoram's clothes, this death had been his. Only flight can deliver him from those that might have been subjects. Jerusalem must be his refuge against the conspiracy of Shechem.

Blessed be God for lawful government. Even a mutinous body cannot want an head: if the rebellious Israelites have cast off their true sovereign, they must choose a false. Jeroboam the son of Nebat must be the man. He had need be skilful, and sit sure, that shall back the horse which hath cast his rider. Israel could not have any where met with more craft and courage than they found in this leader.

Rehoboam returns to Jerusalem lighter by a crown than he went forth.

Judah and Benjamin stick still fast to their loyalty: the example of a general rebellion cannot make them unfaithful to the house of David. God will ever reserve a remnant free from the common contagion. Those tribes, to approve their valour no less

than their fidelity, will fight against their brethren for their prince, and will hazard their lives to reduce the crown to the son of Solomon. An hundred and fourscore thousand of them are up in arms, ready to force Israel to their denied subjection. No noise sounded on both parts but military; no man thought of any thing but blood; when suddenly God sends his prophet to forbid the battle. Shemaiah comes with a message of cessation; *Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house: for this thing is from me, saith the Lord.* The word of one silly prophet dismisses these mighty armies. He that would not lay down the threats of his rigour upon the advice of his ancient counsellors will lay down his sword upon the word of a seer. Shall we envy or shame to see how much the prophets of the Old Testament could do, how little those of the New? If our commission be no less from the same God, the difference of success cannot go away unrevenged.

There was yet some grace in Rehoboam, that he would not spurn against that which God challenged as his own work. Some godless ruffian would have said, "Whosoever is the author, I will be revenged on the instruments." Rehoboam hath learned this lesson of his grandfather, *I held my peace, because thou, Lord, hast done it.* If he might strive with the multitude, he knew it was no striving with his Maker: quietly therefore doth he lay down his arms, not daring, after that prohibition, to seek the recovery of his kingdom by blood.

Where God's purposes are hid from us, we must take the fairest ways of all lawful remedies; but where God hath revealed his determinations, we must sit down in an humble submission: our struggling may aggravate, cannot redress our miseries.

JEROBOAM.—1 Kings xii, xiii.

As there was no public and universal conflict betwixt the ten tribes and the two, so no peace. Either king found reason to fortify the borders of his own territories.

Shechem was worthy to be dear to Jeroboam; a city, as of old seasoned with many treasons, so now auspicious to his new usurpation.

The civil defection was soon followed by the spiritual. As there are near respects betwixt God and his anointed, so there is great affinity betwixt treason and idolatry: there is a connexion betwixt *Fear God* and *Honour the king;* and no less betwixt the neg-

lects of both. In vain shall a man look for faith in a misreligious heart.

Next to Ahithophel, I do not find that Israel yielded a craftier head than Jeroboam's: so hath he plotted this conspiracy, that, whatever fall, there is no place for a challenge: not his own intrusion, but Israel's election, hath raised him to their throne. Neither is his cunning less in holding a stolen sceptre. Thus he thinks in himself; "If Israel have made me their king, it is but a pang of discontentment: these violent thoughts will not last always: sudden fits have commonly sudden recoveries. Their return to their loyalty shall forfeit my head together with my crown: they cannot return to God and hold off from their lawful sovereign: they cannot return to Jerusalem and keep off from God, from their loyalty: thrice a year will their devotion call them up thither, besides the exigence of their frequent vows. How can they be mine while that glorious temple is in their eye; while the magnificence of the royal palace of David and Solomon shall admonish them of their native allegiance; while, besides the solicitation of their brethren, the priests and Levites shall preach to them the necessity of their due obedience, and the abomination of their sacrifices in their wilful disobedience; while they shall by their presence put themselves upon the mercy or justice of their lawful and forsaken prince? Either therefore I must divert them from Jerusalem, or else I cannot live and reign. It is no diverting them by a direct restraint: such prohibition would both endanger their utter distaste and whet their desire to more eagerness. I may change religion, I may not inhibit it; so the people have a God, it sufficeth them. They shall have so much formality as may content them. Their zeal is not so sharp but they can be well pleased with ease. I will proffer them both a more compendious and more plausible worship. Jerusalem shall be supplied within mine own borders. Naturally men love to see the objects of their devotion; I will therefore feed their eyes with two golden representations of their God nearer home; and what can be more proper than those which Aaron devised of old to humour Israel?

Upon this pestilent ground Jeroboam sets up two calves in Dan and Bethel; and persuades the people, *It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.*

O the mischief that comes of wicked infidelity! It was God's prophet that had rent Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces, and had given ten of them to him, in token of his sharing the

ten tribes, who with the same breath also told him that the cause of this distraction was their idolatry: yet now will he institute an idolatrous service for the holding together of them whom their idolatry had rent from their true sovereign to him. He says not, "God hath promised me this kingdom; God hath conferred it; God shall find means to maintain his own act: I will obey him; let him dispose of me: the God of Israel is wise and powerful enough to fetch about his own designs:" but, as if the devices of men were stronger than God's providence and ordination, he will be working out his own ends by profane policies.

Jeroboam, being born an Israelite, and bred in the court of a Solomon, could not but know the express charge of God against the making of images, against the erecting of any rival altars to that of Jerusalem; yet now that he sees both these may avail much to the advancing of his ambitious project he sets up those images, those altars. Wicked men care not to make bold with God in cases of their own commodity: if the laws of their Maker lie in the way of their profit or promotion, they either spurn them out, or tread upon them at pleasure; aspiring minds will know no God but honour.

Israel sojourned in Egypt, and brought home a golden calf; Jeroboam sojourns there, and brought home two. It is hard to dwell in Egypt untainted; not to savour of the sins of the place we live in is no less strange than for wholesome liquor tunned up in a musty vessel not to smell of the cask. The best body may be infected in a contagious air. Let him beware of Egypt that would be free from idolatry,

No sooner are Jeroboam's calves up than Israel is down on their knees; their worship follows immediately upon the erection. How easily is the unstable vulgar carried into whatsoever religion of authority! The weathercock will look which way soever the wind blows. It is no marvel if his subjects be brutish who hath made a calf his god.

Every accessary to sin is filthy, but the first authors of sin are abominable. How is Jeroboam branded in every of these sacred leaves! How do all ages ring of his fact, with the accent of dishonour and indignation; *Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin!* It was a shame for Israel that it could be made to sin by a Jeroboam; but, O cursed name of Jeroboam, that would draw Israel to sin! The followers and abettors of evil are worthy of torment; but no hell is too deep for the leaders of public wickedness.

Religion is clothed with many requisite circumstances. As a new king would have a new god, so that new god must have new temples, altars, services, priests, solemnities; all these hath Jeroboam instituted; all these hath he cast in the same mould with his golden calves. False devotion doth not more cross than imitate the true. Satan is no less a counterfeit than an enemy of God: he knows it more easy to adulterate religion than to abolish it.

That which God ordained for the avoidance of idolatry is made the occasion of it; a limitation of his holy services to Jerusalem. How mischievously do wicked men pervert the wholesome institutions of God to their sin, to their bane!

Jeroboam could not be ignorant how fearfully this very act was revenged upon Israel in the wilderness; yet he dares renew in Dan and Bethel. No example of judgment can affright wilful offenders.

It is not the metal that makes their gods, but the worship, the sacrifices. What sacrifices could there be without priests? No religion could ever want sacred masters of divine ceremonies.

God's clergy was select and honourable, branches of the holy stem of Aaron: Jeroboam rakes up his priests out of the channel of the multitude; all tribes, all persons were good enough for his spurious devotion. Leaden priests are well fitted to golden deities. Religion receives either much honour or blemish by the quality of those that serve at her altars. We are not worthy to profess ourselves servants of the true God, if we do not hold his service worthy of the best.

Jeroboam's calves must have sacrifices, must have solemn festivities, though in a day and month of his own devising. In vain shall we pretend to worship a god if we grudge him the just days and rites of his worship.

It is strange that he who thought the dregs of the vulgar good enough for that priesthood would grace those gods by acting their priest himself; and yet behold where the new king of Israel stands before his new altar, with a sceptre in one hand and a censer in the other, ready to sacrifice to his new gods, when the man of God comes from Judah with a message of judgment.

O desperate condition of Israel, that was so far gone with impiety that it yielded not one faithful monitor to Jeroboam! The time was, that the erecting of but a new altar (for memory, for monument) on the other side of Jordan bred a challenge to the

tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh; and had cost much Israelitish blood, if the quarrelled tribes had not given a seasonable and pious satisfaction; and now, lo, how the stronger stomach of degenerated Israel can digest new altars, new temples, new gods! What a difference there is betwixt a church and kingdom newly breathing from affliction, and settled upon the lees of a misused peace!

But O the patience and mercy of our longsuffering God, that will not strike a very Jeroboam unwarned! Judgment hovers over the heads of sinners ere it light. If Israel afford not a bold reprover of Jeroboam, Judah shall. When the king of Israel is in all the height both of his state and superstition, honouring his solemn day with his richest devotion, steps forth a prophet of God, and interrupts that glorious service with a loud inclamation of judgment.

Doubtless, the man wanted not wit to know what displeasure, what danger, must needs follow so unwelcome a message; yet dares he, upon the commission of God, do this affront to an idolatrous king in the midst of all his awful magnificence. The prophets of God go upon many a thankless errand. He is no messenger for God that either knows or fears the faces of men.

It was the altar, not the person, of Jeroboam which the prophet thus threatens; yet not the stones are stricken, but the founder, in both their apprehensions. So dear are the devices of our own brains to us, as if they were incorporated into ourselves. There is no opposition whereof we are so sensible as that of religion.

That the royal altar should be thus polluted by dead men's bones and the blood of the priests was not more unpleasing than that all this should be done by a child of the house of David; for Jeroboam well saw that the throne and the altar must stand or fall together; that a son of David could not have such power over the altar without an utter subversion of the government, of the succession: therefore is he thus galled with this comminatory prediction.

The rebellious people who had said, *What portion have we in David?* hear now that David will perforce have a portion in them; and might well see what beasts they had made themselves in worshipping the image of a beast, and sacrificing to such a god as could not preserve his own altar from violation and ruin.

All this while I do not see this zealous prophet laying his hand

to the demolition of this idolatrous altar, or threatening a knife to the author of this depravation of religion: only his tongue smites both, not with foul, but sharp words; of menace, not of reproach. It was for Josias, a king, to shed the blood of those sacrificers, to deface those altars: prophets are for the tongue; princes for the hand: prophets must only denounce judgment; princes execute.

Future things are present to the Eternal. It was some two hundred and sixty years ere this prophecy should be fulfilled; yet the man of God speaks of it as now in acting. What are some centuries of years to the Ancient of Days? How slow, and yet how sure is the pace of God's revenge! It is not in the power of time to frustrate God's determinations. There is no less justice nor severity in a delayed punishment.

What a perfect record there is of all names in the roll of heaven; before they be, after they are past! Whatever seeming contingency there is in their imposition, yet they fall under the certainty of a decree, and are better known in heaven ere they be, than on earth while they are.

He that knows what names we shall have before we or the world have a being, doth not often reveal this piece of his knowledge to his creature; here he doth; naming the man that should be two hundred years after, for more assurance of the event, that Israel may say, "This man speaks from a God who knows what shall be."

There cannot be a more sure evidence of a true Godhead than the foreknowledge of those things whose causes have yet no hope of being. But because the proof of this prediction was no more certain than remote, a present demonstration shall convince the future; *The altar shall rend in pieces, the ashes shall be scattered.*

How amazedly must the seduced Israelites needs look upon this miracle! And why do they not think with themselves, "While these stones rend, why are our hearts whole? Of what an overruling power is the God whom we have forsaken, that can thus tear the altars of his co-rivals! How shall we stand before his vengeance, when the very stones break at the word of his prophet?" Perhaps some beholders were thus affected; but Jeroboam, whom it most concerned, instead of bowing his knees for humiliation, stretcheth forth his hand for revenge, and cries, *Lay hold on him.* Resolute wickedness is impatient of a reproof; and

instead of yielding to the voice of God, rebelleth. Just and discreet reprehension doth not more reform some sinners than exasperate others.

How easy it is for God to cool the courage of proud Jeroboam! The hand which his rage stretches out dries up, and cannot be pulled back again: and now stands the king of Israel, like some antique statue, in a posture of impotent endeavour; so disabled to the hurt of the prophet, that he cannot command that piece of himself! What are the great potentates of the world in the powerful hand of the Almighty? Tyrants cannot be so harmful as they are malicious.

The strongest heart may be brought down with affliction. Now the stout stomach of Jeroboam is fallen to an humble deprecation; *Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again.* It must needs be a great strait that could drive a proud heart to beg mercy where he bent his persecution; so doth Jeroboam; holding it no scorn to be beholding to an enemy. In extremities the worst men can be content to sue for favour where they have spent their malice.

It well becomes the prophets of God to be merciful. I do not see this seer to stand upon terms of exprobration and overly contestations with Jeroboam; to say, "Thine intentions to me were cruel. Had thine hand prevailed, I should have sued to thee in vain. Continue ever a spectacle of the fearful justice of thy Maker, whom thou hast provoked by thine idolatry, whom thou wouldest have smitten in my persecution." But he meekly sues for Jeroboam's release; and, that God might abundantly magnify both his power and mercy, is heard and answered with success. We do no whit savour of heaven if we have not learned to do good for evil.

When both wind and sun, the blasts of judgment and the beams of favour, met together to work upon Jeroboam, who would not look that he should have cast off this cumbrous and misbeseeming cloke of his idolatry, and have said, "Lord, thou hast stricken me in justice; thou hast healed me in mercy: I will provoke thee no more: this hand, which thou hast restored, shall be consecrated to thee in pulling down these bold abominations?" Yet now, behold, he goes on in his old courses; and, as if God had neither done him good nor evil, lives and dies idolatrous. No stone is more hard or insensate than a sinful heart. The changes of judgment and mercy do but obdure it instead of meltings.

THE SEDUCED PROPHET.—1 Kings xiii.

Jeroboam's hand is amended; his soul is not: that continues still dry and inflexible. Yet while he is unthankful to the Author of his recovery, he is thankful to the instrument; he kindly invites the prophet whom he had threatened, and will remunerate him whom he endeavoured to punish. The worst men may be sensible of bodily favours; civil respects may well stand with gracelessness; many a one would be liberal of their purses, if they might be allowed to be niggardly of their obedience.

As God, so his prophet, cares not for these waste courtesies, where he sees main duties neglected: more piety would have done well with less compliment: the man of God returns a blunt and peremptory denial to so bounteous an offer; *If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee; neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place.* Kindness is more safely done to an idolater than taken from him: that which is done to him obligeth him; that which is taken from him obligeth us: his obligation to us may be occasion of his good; our obligation to him may occasion our hurt: the surest way is to keep aloof from the infectiously wicked.

The prophet is not uncivil, to reject the favour of a prince without some reason. He yields no reason of his refusal but the command of his God. God hath charged him, *Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.* It is not for a prophet to plead human or carnal grounds for the actions of his function: he may not move but upon a divine warrant.

Would this seer have looked with the eyes of flesh and blood, he might have found many arguments of his yieldance. "He is a king that invites me: his reward, by enriching me, may benefit many; and who knows how much my further conversation may prevail to reform him? How can he be but well prepared for good counsel by a miraculous cure? How gainfully should my receipt of a temporal courtesy be exchanged with a spiritual to him! All Israel will follow him either in idolatry or reformation: which way can be devised of doing so great service to God and the Church as by reclaiming him? what can yield so great likelihood of his reclamation as the opportunity of my further entireness with him?" But the prophet dares not argue cases where he had

a command. Whatever become of Jeroboam and Israel, God must be obeyed. Neither profit nor hopes may carry us cross to the word of our Maker. How safe had this seer been if he had kept him ever upon this sure ward, which he no sooner leaves than he miscarries.

So deeply doth God detest idolatry that he forbids his prophet to eat the bread, to drink the water of a people infected with this sin; yea, to tread in those very steps which their feet have touched. If this inhibition were personal, yet the grounds of it are common. No pestilence should be more shunned than the conversation of the misreligious or openly scandalous: it is no thank to us if their familiarity do not enfeoff us of their wickedness.

I know not what to think of an old prophet that dwells in Bethel, within the air of Jeroboam's idol, within the noise of his sacrifices; that lives where the man of God dares not eat; that permitted his sons to be present at that idolatrous service. If he were a prophet of God, what did he now in Bethel? why did he wink at the sin of Jeroboam? what needed a seer to come out of Judah for the reproof of that sin which was acted under his nose? why did he lie? why did his family partake with idolaters? If he were not a prophet of God, how had he true visions, how had he true messages from God? why did he second the menacing word of that prophet whom he seduced? why did he desire that his own bones might be honoured with his sepulchre? Doubtless he was a prophet of God, but corrupt, resty, vicious.

Prophecy doth not always presuppose sanctification. Many a one hath had visions from God who shall never enjoy the vision of God. A very Balaam in his ecstasies hath so clear a revelation of the Messiah to come as scarce ever any of the holiest prophets; yea, his very ass hath both her mouth miraculously opened and her eyes, to see and notify that angel which was hid from her master; yea, Satan himself sometimes receives notice from God of his future actions, which else that evil spirit could neither foretell nor foresee. These kinds of graces are both rare and common; rare, in that they are seldom given to any; common, in that they are indifferently given to the evil and to the good. A little holiness is worth much illumination.

Whether out of envy to hear that said by the seer of Judah which he either knew not or smothered, to hear that done by another which he could not have effected and could not choose but admire; or whether out of desire to make trial of the fidelity

of so powerful a messenger, the old prophet hastens to overtake, to recall that man of God who had so defied his Bethel; whom he finds sitting faint and weary under an oak in the way, taking the benefit of that shade which he hated to receive from those contagious groves that he had left behind him. His habit easily bewrayed him to a man of his own trade, neither doth his tongue spare to profess himself.

The old prophet of Bethel invites him to return to a repast, and is answered with the same words wherewith Jeroboam's offer was repelled. The man of God varies not a syllable from his message. It concerns us to take good heed of our charge when we go on God's errand.

A denial doth but invite the importunate. What he cannot do by entreaty, the old man tries to do by persuasion; *I am a prophet also as thou art, and an angel spake to me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.* There is no temptation so dangerous as that which comes shrouded under a veil of holiness, and pretends authority of God himself. Jeroboam threatens, the prophet stands undaunted; Jeroboam fawns and promises, the prophet holds constant: now comes a grayheaded seer, and pleads a counter message from God; the prophet yields, and transgresses. Satan may affright us as a fiend, but he seduces us as an angel of light.

Who would have looked for a liar under hoary hairs and an holy mantle? who would not have trusted that gravity when there was no colour of any gain in the untruth? Nothing is so apt to deceive as the fairest semblances, as the sweetest words. We cannot err if we believe not the speech for the person, but the person for the speech.

Well might this man of God think, "An aged man, a prophet, an old prophet, will not sure belie God unto a prophet. No man will forge a lie but for an advantage. What can this man gain by this match but the entertainment of an unprofitable guest? Perhaps though God will not allow me to feast with Jeroboam, yet pitying my faintness he may allow me to eat with a prophet. Perhaps now that I have approved my fidelity in refusing the bread of Bethel, God thinks good to send me a gracious release of that strict charge. Why should I think that God's revelations are not as free to others as to me? and if this prophet have re-

ceived a countermand from an angel of God, how shall I not disobey God if I do not follow him?"

Upon this ground he returns with this deceitful host; and when the meat was now in his mouth receives the true message of death from the same lips that brought him the false message of his invitation; *Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place forbidden thee; thy carcass shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers.*

O woful prophet! when he looks on his host he sees his executioner; while he is feeding of his body he hears of his carcass; at the table he hears of his denied sepulchre; and all this for eating and drinking where he was forbidden by God, though bidden as from God. The violation of the least charge of a God is mortal. No pretences can warrant the transgression of a divine command.

A word from God is pleaded on both sides; the one was received immediately from God, the other related mediately by man; one the prophet was sure of, the other was questionable. A sure word of God may not be left for an uncertain. An express charge of the Almighty admitteth not of any check. His will is but one as himself is, and therefore it is out of the danger of contradiction.

Methinks I see the man of God change countenance at this sharp sauce of his pleasing morsels. His face beforehand is dyed with the paleness of death. Methinks I hear him urging many unkind expostulations with his injurious host, who yet dismisses him better provided for the ease of his journey than he found him. Perhaps this officiousness was out of desire to make some amends for this late seducement. It is a poor recompense, when he hath betrayed his life and wronged the soul, to cast some courtesies upon the body.

The old Bethelite, that had taken pains to come and fetch the man of God into sin, will not now go back with him to accompany his departure. Doubtless he was afraid to be enwrapped in the judgment which he saw hanged over that obnoxious head. Thus the mischievous guides of wickedness leave a man when they have led him to his bane; as familiar devils forsake their witches when they have brought them once into fetters.

The man of God returns alone; careful, no doubt, and pensive for his offence, when a lion out of the wood meets him, assaults

him, kills him. O the just and severe judgments of the Almighty, who hath brought this fierce beast out of his wild ranges into the highway, to be the executioner of his offending servant!

Doubtless this prophet was a man of great holiness, of singular fidelity, else he durst not have been God's herald to carry a message of defiance to Jeroboam king of Israel, in the midst of his royal magnificence; yet now, for varying from but a circumstance of God's command, though upon the suggestion of a divine warrant, is given for a prey to the lion. Our interest in God is so far from excusing our sin, that it aggravates it. Of all others the sin of a prophet shall not pass unrevenged.

The very wild beasts are led by a providence. Their wise and powerful Creator knows how to serve himself of them. The lions guard one prophet, kill another, according to the commission received from their Maker. What sinner can hope to escape unpunished when every creature of God is ready to be an avenger of evil? The beasts of the field were made to serve us, we to serve our Creator. When we forsake our homage to him that made us, it is no marvel if the beasts forget their duty to us, and deal with us, not as masters, but as rebels.

When a holy man buys so dearly such a slight frailty of a credulous mistaking, what shall become of our heinous and presumptuous sins?

I cannot think but this prophet died in the favour of God, though by the teeth of the lion. His life was forfeited for example, his soul was safe; yea, his very carcass was left, though torn, yet fair, after those deadly grasps; as if God had said, "I will only take thy breath from thee as the penalty of thy disobedience. A lion shall do that which an apoplexy or fever might do. I owe thee no further revenge than may be satisfied with thy blood." Violent events do not always argue the anger of God. Even death itself is to his servants a fatherly castigation.

But O the unsearchable ways of the Almighty! the man of God sins and dies speedily, the lying prophet that seduced him survives; yea, wicked Jeroboam enjoys his idolatry and treads upon the grave of his reprover. There is neither favour in the delay of stripes, nor displeasure in the haste: rather, whom God loves he chastises, as sharply, so speedily, while the rest prosper to condemnation. Even the rod of a loving father may draw blood. How much happier is it for us that we die now to live for ever, than that we live a while to die ever!

Had this lion set upon the prophet for hunger, why did he not devour as well as kill him? Why did he not rather kill the beast than the man? since we know the nature of the lion such, that he is not wont to assail man save in the extreme want of other prey. Certainly the same power that employed those fangs restrained them, that the world might see it was not appetite that provoked the beast to this violence, but the overruling command of God. Even so, O Lord, thy powerful hand is over that roaring lion that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour. Thine hand withholds him, that though he may shed the blood of thine elect, yet he cannot hurt their souls; and while he doth those things which thou permittest, and orderest to thy just ends, yet he cannot do lesser things, which he desireth, and thou permittest not.

The fierce beast stands by the carcass, as to avow his own act and to tell who sent him, so to preserve that body which he hath slain. O wonderful work of God! the executioner is turned guardian; and, as the officer of the Highest, commands all other creatures to stand aloof from his charge, and commands the fearful ass that brought this burden thither not to stir thence, but stand ready pressed to recarry it to the sepulchre: and now, when he hath sufficiently witnessed to all passengers that this act was not done upon his own hunger, but upon the quarrel of his Maker, he delivers up his charge to that old prophet, who was no less guilty of this blood than himself.

This old seducer hath so much truth as both to give a right commentary upon God's intention in this act for the terror of the disobedient, and to give his voice to the certainty of that future judgment which his late guest had threatened to Israel. Sometimes it pleaseth the wisdom of God to express and justify himself even by the tongues of faulty instruments. Withal he hath so much faith and courage as to fetch that carcass from the lion; so much pity and compassion as to weep for the man of God, to inter him in his own sepulchre; so much love as to wish himself joined in death to that body which he had hastened unto death. It is hard to find a man absolutely wicked. Some grace will bewray itself in the most forsaken breasts.

It is a cruel courtesy to kill a man, and then to help him to his grave; to betray a man with our breath, and then to bedew him with our tears. The prophet had needed no such friend if he had not met with such an enemy: *The mercies of the wicked are cruel.*

JEROBOAM'S WIFE.—1 Kings xiv.

It is no measuring of God's favour by the line of outward welfare. Jeroboam, the idolatrous usurper of Israel, prospers better than the true heirs of David. He lives to see three successions in the throne of Judah. Thus the ivy lives when the oak is dead.

Yet could not that misgotten crown of his keep his head always from aching: he hath his crosses too. God whips sometimes more than his own: his enemies smart from him, as well as his children; his children in love, his enemies in judgment. Not simply the rod argues love, but the temper of the hand that wields it, and the back that feels it.

First, Jeroboam's hand was stricken; now his son. Abijah the eldest, the best son of Jeroboam, is smitten with sickness. As children are but the pieces of their parents in another skin, so parents are no less stricken in their children than in their natural limbs. Jeroboam doth not more feel his arm than his son. Not wicked men only, but beasts may have natural affections. It is no thank to any creature to love his own.

Nature wrought in Jeroboam, not grace. He is enough troubled with his son's disease, no whit bettered. I would have heard him say, "God follows me with his afflictions. It is for mine impiety. What other measure can I expect from his justice? While mine idols stand, how can I look that my house should prosper? I will turn from my wickedness; O God, turn thou from thy wrath."

These thoughts were too good for that obdured heart. His son is sick, he is sorrowful; but as an amazed man seeks to go forth at the wrong door, his distraction sends him to a false help. He thinks not of God; he thinks of his prophet: he thinks of the prophet that had foretold him he should be a king; he thinks not of the God of that prophet who made him a king. It is the property of a carnal heart to confine both his obligations and his hopes to the means, neglecting the Author of good. Vain is the respect that is given to the servant where the master is contemned.

Extremity draws Jeroboam's thoughts to the prophet, whom else he had not cared to remember. The king of Israel had divines enough of his own, else he must needs have thought them miserable gods that were not worth a prophet: and besides, there was an old prophet (if he yet survived) dwelling within the smoke

of his palace whose visions had been too well approved: why should Jeroboam send so far to an Abijah? Certainly, his heart despised those base priests of his high places, neither could he trust either to the gods or the clergy of his own making. His conscience rests upon the fidelity of that man whose doctrine he had forsaken. How did this idolater strive against his own heart while he inwardly despised those whom he professed to honour, and inwardly honoured them whom he professed to despise! Wicked breasts are false to themselves, neither trusting to their own choice, nor making choice of that which they may dare to trust. They will set a good face upon their secretly unpleasing sins, and had rather be self-condemned than wise and penitent.

As for that old seer, it is like Jeroboam knew his skill, but doubted of his sincerity. That man was too much his neighbour to be good. Abijah's truth had been tried in a case of his own: he whose word was found just in the prediction of his kingdom was well worthy of credit in the news of his son. Experience is a great encouragement of our trust. It is a good matter to be faithful: this loadstone of our fidelity shall draw to us even hearts of iron, and hold them to our reliance; as, contrarily, deceit doth both argue and make a bankrupt. Who can trust where he is disappointed? O God, so oft, so ever, have we found thee true in all thy promises, in all thy performances, that if we do not seek thee, if we do not trust thee in the sequel, we are worthy of our loss, worthy of thy desertions.

Yet I do not see that Jeroboam sends to the prophet for his aid, but for intelligence. Curiosity is guilty of this message, and not devotion. He calls not for the prayers, not for the benediction of that holy man, but for mere information of the event. He well saw what the prayers of a prophet could do. That which cured his hand, might it not have cured his son? Yet he that said to a man of God, *Entreat the face of the Lord thy God, that he may restore my hand*, says not now in his message to Abijah, "Entreat thy God to restore my son." Sin makes such a strangeness betwixt God and man, that the guilty heart either thinks not of suing to God or fears it. What a poor contentment it was to foreknow that evil which he could not avoid, and whose notice could but hasten his misery! Yet thus fond is our restless curiosity, that it seeks ease in the drawing on of torment. He is worthy of sorrow that will not stay till it comes to him, but goes to fetch it.

Whom doth Jeroboam send on this message but his wife? and how, but disguised? Why her, and why thus? Neither durst he trust this errand with another, nor with her in her own form. It was a secret, that Jeroboam sends to a prophet of God: none might know it but his own bosom and she that lay in it. If this had been noised in Israel, the example had been dangerous. Who would not have said, "The king is glad to leave his counterfeit deities and seek to the true: why should we adhere to them whom he forsakes?"

As the message must not be known to the people, so she that bears it must not be known to the prophet: her name, her habit must be changed; she must put off her robes and put on a russet coat; she must put off the queen and put on the peasant; instead of her sceptre, she must take up a basket, and go a masked pilgrimage to Shiloh. O the fondness of vain men, that think to juggle with the Almighty, and to hide their counsels from that all-seeing eye! If this change of habit were necessary at Bethel, yet what needs it at Shiloh? Though she would hide her face from her subjects, yet why should she not pull off her muffler, and show herself to the prophet? Certainly, what policy began guiltiness must continue. Well might she think, "There can be no good answer expected of the wife of Jeroboam. My presence will do no less than solicit a reproof. No prophet can speak well to the consort of a founder of idolatry. I may perhaps hear good as another; though, as myself, I can look for nothing but tidings of evil." Wicked hearts know they deserve ill at God's hands, and therefore they do all they can to avoid the eyes of his displeased justice; and if they cannot do it by colours of dissimulation, they will do it by imploration of shelter: they shall say to the rocks, *Fall on us, and cover us.*

But O the gross folly, mixed with the craft of wickedness! Could Jeroboam think that the prophet could know the event of his son's disease, and did he think that he could not know the disguise of his wife? The one was present, the other future; this was but wrapped in a clout, that event was wrapped up in the counsel of God: yet this politic head presumes that the greater shall be revealed where the lesser shall be hid. There was never wicked man that was not infatuate, and in nothing more than in those things wherein he hoped most to transcend the reach of others.

Abijah, shunning the iniquity of the times, was retired to a

solitary corner of Shiloh. No place could be too private for an honest prophet in so extreme depravedness: yet even there doth the king of Israel take notice of his reclusion, and send his wife to that poor cell laden with presents, presents that dissembled their bearer. Had she offered jewels or gold, her greatness had been suspected: now she brings loaves and cracknels and honey, her hand answers her back. She gives as she seems, not as she is. Something she must give, even when she acts the poorest client.

The prophets of God were not wont to have empty visitations. They who hated bribes yet refused not tokens of gratitude. Yea, the God of heaven, who neither needs our goods nor is capable of our gratifications, yet would have no man to come to him giftless. Woe to those sacrilegious hands, that instead of bringing to the prophets carry from them!

Jeroboam was a bad man; yet as he had a towardly son, so he had an obedient wife; else she had not wanted excuses to turn off both the journey and the disguise. Against the disguise she had pleaded the unbeseemingness for her person and state; against the journey, the perils of so long and solitary a walk. Perhaps a lion might be in the way, the lion that tore the prophet in pieces: perhaps robbers; or, if not they, perhaps her chastity might be in danger; an unguarded solitariness in the weaker sex might be a provocation to some forced uncleanness. She casts off all these shifting projections of fear. According to the will of her husband, she changes her raiment; she sets upon the journey, and overcomes it.

What needed this disguise to an old prophet whose dim eyes were set with age? All clothes, all faces were alike to a blind seer. The visions of Abijah were inward; neither was his bodily sight more dusky than the eyes of his mind were clear and piercing. It was not the common light of men whereby he saw, but divine illumination. Things absent, things future, were no less obvious to those spiritual beams than present things are to us. Ere the quick eyes of that great lady can discern him, he hath espied her; and so soon as he hears the sound of her feet, she hears from him the sound of her name; *Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam.* How God laughs in heaven at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians, and, when they think themselves most sure, shames them with a detection, with a defeat! What an idleness it is for foolish hypocrites to hope they can dance in a net unseen of Heaven!

Never before was this queen troubled to hear of herself; now she is. Her very name struck her with astonishment, and prepares her for the assured horror of following judgments: *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings: go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.*

Could this lady less wonder at the mercy of this style of God, than tremble at the sequel of his justice? Lo, Israel hath forsaken God; yet God still owns Israel: Israel had gone a whoring; yet God hath not divorced her! O the infinite goodness of our long-suffering God, whom our foulest sins cannot rob of his compassions!

By how much dearer Israel was to God, so much more odious is Jeroboam, that hath marred Israel. Terrible is that vengeance which God thunders against him by his prophet; whose passionate message upbraids him with his promotions, chargeth him with his sins, and lastly denounceth his judgments. No mouth was fitter to cast this royalty in the teeth of Jeroboam than that by which it was first foretold, forepromised. Every circumstance of the advancement aggravates the sin. "*I exalted thee:* thou couldest not rise to honour alone. *I exalted thee from among the people;* not from the peers; thy rank was but common before this rise. *I exalted thee from among the people to be a prince:* subordinate height was not enough for thee; no seat would serve thee but a throne. *Yea, to be a prince of my people Israel:* no nation was for thee but my chosen one; none but my royal inheritance. Neither did I raise thee into a vacant throne; a forlorn and forsaken principality might be thankless; but *I rent the kingdom away from another for thy sake;* yea, from what other but the grandchild of David? Out of his hands did I wrest the sceptre to give it into thine." O what high favours doth God sometimes cast away upon unworthy subjects! How do his abused bounties double both their sin and judgment! The sins of this prince were no less eminent than his obligations; therefore his judgments shall be no less eminent than his sins.

How bitterly doth God express that which shall be more bitter in the execution! *Behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man that taketh away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth*

of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.

O heavy load that this disguised princess must carry to her husband! But because these evils, though grievous, yet might be remote; therefore for a present handsel of vengeance she is dismissed with the sad tidings of the death of her son; *When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.* It is heavy news for a mother that she must lose her son; but worse yet that she may not see him. In these cases of our final departures our presence gives some mitigation to our grief. Might she but have closed the eyes and have received the last breath of her dying son, the loss had been more tolerable. I know not how our personal farewell eases our heart, even while it increases our passion. But now she shall no more see nor be seen of her Abijah: she shall no sooner be in the city than he shall be out of the world. Yet more to perfect her sorrow, she hears that in him alone there is found some good; the rest of her issue are graceless: she must lose the good, and hold the graceless; he shall die to afflict her; they shall live to afflict her.

Yet what a mixture is here of severity and favour in one act; favour to the son, severity to the father: severity to the father, that he must lose such a son: favour to the son, that he shall be taken from such a father! Jeroboam is wicked, therefore he shall not enjoy an Abijah; Abijah hath some good things, therefore he shall be removed from the danger of the depravation of Jeroboam. Sometimes God strikes in favour, but more often forbears out of severity. The best are fittest for heaven; the earth is fittest for the worst: this is the region of sin and misery, that of immortality. It is no argument of disfavour to be taken early from a well-led life; as not of approbation to age in sin.

As the soul of Abijah is favoured in the removal, so is his body with a burial. He shall have alone both tears and tomb: all the rest of his brethren shall have no grave but dogs and fowls, no sorrow but for their life. Though the carcass be insensible of any position, yet honest sepulture is a blessing. It is fit the body should be duly respected on earth whose soul is glorious in heaven.

ASA.—1 Kings xv; 2 Chronicles xiv, xv, xvi.

The two houses of Judah and Israel grow up now together in an ambitious rivality. This splitted plant branches out so severally as if it had forgotten that ever it was joined in the root.

The throne of David oft changeth the possessors, and more complaineth of their iniquity than their remove.

Abijam inherits the sins of his father Rehoboam no less than his crown, and so spends his three years as if he had been no whit akin to his grandfather's virtues. It is no news that grace is not traduced while vice is. Therefore is his reign short because it was wicked.

It was a sad case when both the kings of Judah and Israel, though enemies, yet conspired in sin. Rehoboam, like his father Solomon, began graciously, but fell to idolatry. As he followed his father, so his son, so his people followed him. O, what a face of a Church was here when Israel worshipped Jeroboam's calves, when Judah built them high places and images and groves on every high hill and under every green tree! On both hands GOD is forsaken, his temple neglected, his worship adulterate; and this, not for some short brunt, but during the succession of two kings: for after the first three years, Rehoboam changed his father's religion (as his shields) from gold to brass; the rest of his seventeen years were led in impiety. His son Abijam trod in the same miry steps, and Judah with them both. If there were any (doubtless there were some) faithful hearts yet remaining in both kingdoms during these heavy times, what a corrosive it must needs have been to them to see so deplored and miserable a depravation!

There was no visible Church upon earth but here; and this, what a one! O God, how low dost thou sometimes suffer thine own flock to be driven! What woful wanes and eclipses hast thou ordained for this heavenly body! Yet at last an Asa shall arise from the loins, from the grave of Abijam. He shall revive David and reform Judah. The gloomy times of corruption shall not last always. The light of truth and peace shall at length break out and bless the sad hearts of the righteous.

It is a wonder how Asa should be good, of the seed of Abijam, of the soil of Maachah; both wicked, both idolatrous. God would have us see that grace is from heaven, neither needs the help of these earthly conveyances. Should not the children of good

parents sometimes be evil, and the children of evil parents good, virtue would seem natural, and the Giver would lose his thanks. Thus we have seen a fair flower spring out of dung, and a well-fruited tree rise out of a sour stock. Education hath no less power to corrupt than nature: it is therefore the just praise of Asa that, being trained up under an idolatrous Maachah, he maintained his piety; as contrarily it is a shame for those that have been bred up in the precepts and examples of virtue and godliness, to fall off to lewdness or superstition.

There are four principal monuments of Asa's virtue, as so many rich stones in his diadem.

He took away sodomy and idols out of Judah. Who cannot wonder more that he found them there, than that he removed them? What a strange incongruity is this; Sodom in Jerusalem! idols in Judah! Surely debauched profession proves desperate. Admit the idols, ye cannot doubt of the sodomy. If they *have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things*, it is no marvel if God *give them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.* If they *changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever*, no marvel, if God *give them up to vile affections, to change the natural use into that which is against nature; burning in lust one towards another, men with men working that which is unseemly.* Contrarily, admit the sodomy, ye cannot doubt of the idols. Unnatural beastliness in manners is punished justly with a sottish dotage in religion; bodily pollution, with spiritual. How should the soul care to be chaste that keeps a stews in the body! Asa begins with the banishment of both, scouring Judah of this double uncleanness. In vain should he have hoped to restore God to his kingdom while these abominations inhabited it. It is justly the main care of worthy and religious princes to clear their coasts of the foulest sins. O the impartial zeal of Asa! There were idols that challenged a prerogative of favour, the idols that his father had made; all these he defaces. The name of a father cannot protect an idol. The duty to his parent cannot win him to a liking, to a forbearance of his misdevotion. Yea, so much the more doth the heart of Asa rise against these puppets, for that they were the sin, the shame of his father. Did there want, think we, some

courtier of his father's retinue to say, "Sir, favour the memory of him that begot you; you cannot demolish these statues without the dishonour of their erector; hide your dislike at the least; it will be your glory to lay your finger upon this blot of your father's reputation; if you list not to allow his act, yet wink at it?" The godly zeal of Asa turns the deaf ear to these monitors, and lets them see that he doth not more honour a father than hate an idol. No dearness of person should take off the edge of our detestation of the sin. Nature is worthy of forgetfulness and contempt in opposition to the God of nature.

Upon the same ground as he removed the idols of his father Abijam, so for idols he removed his grandmother Maachah; she would not be removed from her obscene idols; she is therefore removed from the station of her honour. That princess had aged both in her regency and superstition. Under her rod was Asa brought up, and schooled in the rudiments of her idolatry. Whom she could not infect, she hoped to overawe; so as if Asa will not follow her gods, yet she presumes that she may retain her own. Doubtless, no means were neglected for her reclamation; none would prevail. Religious Asa gathers up himself, and begins to remember that he is a king, though a son; that she, though a mother, yet is a subject; that her eminence could not but countenance idolatry; that her greatness suppressed religion, which he should in vain hope to reform while her superstition swayed: forgetting therefore the challenges of nature, the awe of infancy, the custom of reverence, he strips her of that command which he saw prejudicial to his Maker. All respects of flesh and blood must be trampled on for God. Could that long-settled idolatry want abettors? Questionless some or other would say, "This was the religion of your father Abijam; this, of your grandfather Rehoboam; this, of the latter days of your wise and great-grandfather Solomon; this, of your grandmother Maachah; this, of your great-grandmother Naamah; why should it not be yours? Why should you suspect either the wisdom or piety or salvation of so many predecessors?" Good Asa had learned to contemn prescription against a direct law. He had the grace to know it was no measuring truth by so modern antiquity. His eyes, scorning to look so low, raise up themselves to the uncorrupt times of Solomon, to David, to Samuel, to the Judges, to Joshua, to Moses, to the Patriarchs, to Noah, to the religious founders of the first world, to the first father of mankind, to Paradise, to

Heaven. In comparison of these, Maachah's god cannot overlook yesterday. The ancientest error is but a novice to truth; and if never any example could be pleaded for purity of religion, it is enough that the precept is express. He knew what God said in Sinai, and wrote in the tables; *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor any similitude. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.* If all the world had been an idolater, ever since that word was given, he knew how little that precedent could avail for disobedience. Practice must be corrected by law, and not the law yield to practice. Maachah therefore goes down from her seat; her idols from their grove; she to retiredness, they to the fire, and from thence to the water. Woful deities! that could both burn and drown.

Neither did the zeal of Asa more magnify itself in these privative acts of weeding out the corruptions of religion than in the positive acts of an holy plantation. In the falling of those idolatrous shrines the temple of God flourishes. That doth he furnish with those sacred treasures which were dedicated by himself, by his progenitors. Like the true son of David, he would not serve God cost-free. Rehoboam turned Solomon's gold into brass, Asa turns Rehoboam's brass into gold. Some of these vessels, it seems, Abijam, Asa's father, had dedicated to God; but after his vow, inquired, yea, withheld them: Asa, like a good son, pays his father's debts and his own. It is a good sign of a well-meant devotion when we can abide it chargeable; as contrarily, in the affairs of God, a niggardly hand argues a cold and hollow heart.

All these were noble and excellent acts: the extirpation of sodomy; the demolition of idols; the removal of Maachah; the bounteous contribution to the temple: but that which gives true life unto all these is a sound root: *Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.* No less laudable works than these have proceeded from hypocrisy; which while they have carried away applause from men have lost their thanks with God. All Asa's gold was but dross to his pure intentions.

But O, what great and many infirmities may consist with uprightness. What allays of imperfection will there be found in the most refined soul! Four no small faults are found in true-hearted Asa.

First, the high places stood still unremoved. What high places? There were some dedicated to the worship of false gods; these Asa took away: there were some misdevoted to the worship of the

true God, these he lets stand. There was gross idolatry in the former; there was a weak will-worship in the latter. While he opposes impiety he winks at mistakings. Yet even the variety of altars was forbidden by an express charge from God, who had confined his service to the temple. With one breath doth God report both these: *The high places were not removed; yet, nevertheless, Asa's heart was perfect.* God will not see weaknesses where he sees truth. How pleasing a thing is sincerity, that in favour thereof the mercy of our just God digests many an error! O God, let our hearts go upright though our feet slide: the fall cannot, through thy grace, be deadly, however it may shame or pain us.

Besides, to confront his rival of Israel, Baasha, this religious king of Judah fetches in Benhadad, the king of Syria, into God's inheritance upon too dear a rate; the breach of his league, the expilation of the temple. All the wealth wherewith Asa had endowed the house of the Lord was little enough to hire an Edomite to betray his fidelity and to invade Israel. Leagues may be made with infidels; not at such a price, upon such terms. There can be no warrant for a wilful subornation of perfidiousness. In these cases of outward things the mercy of God dispenseth with our true necessities, not with the affected. O Asa, where was thy piety while thou robbedst God to corrupt an infidel for the slaughter of Israelites? O princes, where is your piety while you hire Turks to the slaughter of Christians, to the spoil of God's church?

Yet, which was worse, Asa doth not only employ the Syrian, but relies on him; relies not on God. A confidence less sinful cost his grandfather David dear. And when Hanani, God's seer, the herald of heaven, came to denounce war against him for these sins, Asa, instead of penitence, breaks into choler; fury sparkles in those eyes which should have gushed out with water; those lips that should have called for mercy command revenge. How ill do these two agree, the heart of David, the tongue of Jeroboam! That holy grandfather of his would not have done so: when God's messenger reproved him for sin, he condemned it and himself for it: I see his tears; I do not hear his threats. It ill becomes a faithful heart to rage where it should sorrow, and instead of submission to persecute. Sometimes no difference appears betwixt a son of David and the son of Nebat. Any man may do ill, but to defend it, to outface it, is for rebels; yet even upright Asa imprisons the prophet and crusheth his gainsayers. It were pity

that the best man should be judged by every of his actions, and not by all. The course of our life must either allow or condemn us, not these sudden eruptions.

As the life, so the deathbed of Asa wanted not infirmities. Long and prosperous had his reign been; now, after forty years' health and happiness, he that imprisoned the prophet is imprisoned in his bed. There is more pain in those fetters which God put upon Asa than those which Asa puts upon Hanani. And now, behold, he that in his war seeks to Benhadad, not to God, in his sickness seeks not to God but to physicians. We cannot easily put upon God a greater wrong than the alienation of our trust. Earthly means are for use, not for confidence. We may, we must employ them; we may not rely upon them. Well may God challenge our trust as his peculiar; which if we cast upon any creature we deify it. Whence have herbs and drugs and physicians their being and efficacy but from that divine hand? No marvel then if Asa's gout struck to his heart, and his feet carried him to his grave; since his heart was miscarried for the cure of his feet to an injurious misconfidence in the means, with neglect of his Maker.

ELIJAH WITH THE SAREPTAN.—1 Kings xvii.

Who should be matched with Moses in the hill of Tabor but Elijah? Surely next after Moses there was never any prophet of the Old Testament more glorious than he.

None more glorious, none more obscure. The other prophets are not mentioned without the name of their parent, for the mutual honour both of the father and the son; Elijah, as if he had been a son of the earth, comes forth with the bare mention of the place of his birth. Meanness of descent is no block in God's way to the most honourable vocations. It matters not whose son he be whom God will grace with his service. In the greatest honours that human nature is capable of God forgets our parents: as, when we shall be raised up to a glorious life, there shall be no respect had to the loins whence we came, so it is proportionally in these spiritual advancements.

These times were fit for an Elijah; an Elijah was fit for them. The eminentest prophet is reserved for the corruptest age. Israel had never such a king as Ahab for impiety, never so miraculous a prophet as Elijah: this Elijah is addressed to this Ahab. The God of spirits knows how to proportion men to the occasions; and

to raise up to himself such witnesses as may be most able to convince the world: a mild Moses was for the low estate of afflicted Israel; mild of spirit, but mighty in wonders; mild of spirit, because he had to do with a persecuted, and yet a techy and perverse people; mighty in wonders, because he had to do with a Pharaoh: a grave and holy Samuel was for the quiet consistence of Israel: a fiery spirited Elijah was for the desperatest declination of Israel: and if in the late times of the depraved condition of his Church God have raised up some spirits that have been more warm and stirring than those of common mould, we cannot censure the choice when we see the service.

The first word that we hear from Elijah is an oath, and a threat to Ahab, to Israel; *As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.* He comes in like a tempest who went out in a whirlwind. Doubtless he had spoken fair and peaceable invitations to Israel, though we hear them not: this was but the storm which followed his repulse, their obstinacy. After many solicitations and warnings Israel is stricken by the same tongue that had prayed for it.

Elijah dares avouch these judgments to their head, to Ahab. I do not so much wonder at the boldness of Elijah as at his power; yea, who sees his power can no whit wonder at his boldness. How could he be but bold to the face of a man who was thus powerful with God?

As if God had lent him the keys of heaven, to shut it up and open it at pleasure, he can say, *There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.* O God, how far it hath pleased thee to communicate thyself to a weak man! What angel could ever say thus? Thy hand, O Lord, is not shortened. Why art thou not thus marvellous in the ministers of thy gospel? Is it for that their miracles were ours? Is it for that thou wouldest have us live by faith, not by sense? Is it for that our task is spiritual, and therefore more abstracted from bodily helps? We cannot command the sun with Joshua, nor the thunder with Samuel, nor the rain with Elijah: it shall content us if we can fix the Sun of Righteousness in the soul; if we can thunder out the judgments of God against sin; if we can water the earthen hearts of men with the former and latter rain of heavenly doctrine.

Elijah's mantle cannot make him forget his flesh. While he knows himself a prophet, he remembers to be a man; he doth not

therefore arrogate his power as his own, but publisheth it as his Master's. This restraint must be according to his word; and that word was from an higher mouth than his. He spake from Him by whom he sware, whose word was sure as his life; and therefore he durst say, *As the Lord liveth, there shall be no rain.* Man only can denounce what God will execute; which when it is once revealed can no more fail than the Almighty himself.

He that had this interest and power in heaven, what needed he flee from an earthly pursuit? Could his prayers restrain the clouds and not hold the hands of flesh and blood? Yet behold, Elijah must flee from Ahab, and hide him by the brook Cherith. The wisdom of God doth not think fit so to make a beaten path of miracles as that he will not walk beside it. He will have our own endeavours concur to our preservation. Elijah wanted neither courage of heart nor strength of hand, and yet he must trust to his feet for safety. How much more lawful is it for our impotence to flee from persecution! Even that God sends him to hide his head who could as easily have protected as nourished him. He that wilfully stands still to latch dangers tempteth God instead of trusting him.

The prophet must be gone; not without order taken for his purveyance. O the strange caterers for Elijah; *I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.* I know not whether had been more miraculous, to preserve him without meat, or to provide meat by such mouths. The raven, a devouring and ravenous fowl, that uses to snatch away meat from others, brings it to him. He that could have fed Elijah by angels will feed him by ravens. There was then in Israel an hospitable Obadiah, that kept a secret table in two several caves for an hundred prophets of God. There were seven thousand faithful Israelites, in spite of the devil, who had never bowed knee to Baal. Doubtless, any of these would have had a trencher ready for Elijah, and have thought himself happy to have defrauded his own maw for so noble a prophet. God rather chooses to make use of the most unlikely fowls of the air than their bounty, that he might give both to his prophet and us a pregnant proof of his absolute command over all his creatures, and win our trust in all extremities. Who can make question of the provisions of God, when he sees the very ravens shall forget their own hunger, and purvey for Elijah? O God, thou, that providest meat for the fowls of the air, wilt make the fowls of the air provide meat for man, rather than his dependence on

thee shall be disappointed. O let not our faith be wanting to thee; thy care can never be wanting to us.

Elijah might have lived for the time with bread and water, neither had his fare been worse than his fellows in the caves of Obadiah; but the munificence of God will have his meals better furnished; the ravens shall bring him both bread and flesh twice in the day.

It is not for a persecuted prophet to long after delicates. God gives order for competency, not for wantonness. Not out of the dainty compositions in Jezebel's kitchen, not out of the pleasant wines in her cellar, would God provide for Elijah; but the ravens shall bring him plain and homely victuals, and the river shall afford him drink. If we have wherewith to sustain nature, though not to pamper it, we owe thanks to the Giver. Those of God's family may not be curious, not disdainful. Ill doth it become a servant of the Highest to be a slave to his palate. Doubtless, one bit from the mouth of the raven was more pleasing to Elijah than a whole tableful of Ahab. Nothing is more comfortable to God's children than to see the sensible demonstrations of the divine care and providence.

The brook Cherith cannot last always. That stream shall not, for Elijah's sake, be exempted from the universal exsiccation; yea, the prophet himself feels the smart of this drought which he had denounced. It is no unusual thing with God to suffer his own dear children to be enwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. He makes difference in the use and issue of their stripes, not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weeds, but to a better purpose.

When the brook fails, God hath a Zarephath for Elijah: instead of the ravens, a widow shall there feed him; yea, herself by him. Who can enough wonder at the pitch of this selective providence of the Almighty! Zarephath was a town of Sidon, and therefore without the pale of the Church. Poverty was the best of this widow: she was a pagan by birth, heathenishly superstitious by institution. *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto this Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.* He that first fed the prophet by the mouth of unclean fowls will now feed him by the hand of an heathenish hostess. His only command sanc-

tifies those creatures which by a general charge were legally impure.

There were other birds besides ravens, other widows besides this Sareptan; none but the ravens, none but the Sareptan, shall nourish Elijah. God's choice is not led in the string of human reasons. His holy will is the guide and the ground of all his elections. *It is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but in God that shows mercy.*

The prophet follows the call of his God. The same hand that brought him to the gate of Sarepta led also this poor widow out of her doors. She shall then go to seek her sticks when she shall be found of Elijah. She thought of her hearth; she thought not of a prophet; when the man of God calls to her, *Fetch me a little water, I pray thee, in a vessel, that I may drink.* It was no easy suit in so droughty a season; and yet, at the first sight, the prophet dares second it with a greater; *Bring me a morsel of bread in thine hand.* That long drought had made every drop, every crumb precious; yet the prophet is emboldened, by the charge of God, to call for both water and bread. He had found the ravens so officious that he cannot make doubt of the Sareptan. She sticks not at the water; she would not stick at the bread if necessity had not pressed her; *As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*

If she knew not the man, how did she know his God? And if she knew not the God of Elijah, how did she swear by him? Certainly, though she were without the bounds of Israel, yet she was within the borders. So much she had gained by her neighbourhood, to know an Israelite, a prophet by his habit; to know the only living God was the God of the prophet, the God of Israel: and if this had not been, yet it is no marvel if the widow knew Elijah, since the ravens knew him.

It was high time for the prophet to visit the Sareptan. Poor soul! she was now making her last meal: after one mean morsel she was yielding herself over to death. How opportunely hath God provided succours to our distresses! It is his glory to help at a pinch; to begin where we have given over, that our relief might be so much the more welcome by how much it is less looked for.

But O, what a trial is this of the faith of a weak proselyte, if she were so much! *Fear not; go, do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it to me, and after make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, till the day that God send rain upon the earth.* She must go spend upon a stranger part of that little she hath in hope of more, which she hath not, which she may have. She must part with her present food, which she saw, in trust of future, which she could not see. She must rob her sense in the exercise of her belief, and shorten her life in being, upon the hope of a protraction of it in promise. She must believe God will miraculously increase what she hath yielded to consume. She must first feed the stranger with her last victuals, and then after, herself and her son.

Some sharp dame would have taken up the prophet, and have sent him away with an angry repulse: "Bold Israelite, there is no reason in this request. Wert thou a friend or a brother, with what face couldest thou require to pull my last bit out of my mouth? Had I superfluity of provision, thou mightest hope for this effect of my charity; now that I have but one morsel for myself and my son, this is an injurious importunity. What can induce thee to think thy life, an unknown traveller, should be more dear to me than my son's, than my own? How uncivil is this motion, that I should first make provision for thee in this dying extremity! It had been too much to have begged my last scraps. Thou tellest me the meal shall not waste, nor the oil fail; how shall I believe thee? Let me see that done before thou eatest. In vain should I challenge thee when the remainder of my poor store is consumed. If thou canst so easily multiply victuals, how is it that thou wantest? Do that beforehand which thou promisest shall be afterwards performed, there will be no need of my little."

But this good Sareptan was wrought by God not to mistrust a prophet. She will do what he bids, and hope for what he promises. She will live by faith rather than by sense, and give away the present in the confidence of a future remuneration. First, she bakes Elijah's cake, then her own; not grudging to see her last morsels going down another's throat, while herself was famishing. How hard precepts doth God lay where he intends bounty! Had not God meant her preservation, he had

suffered her to eat her last cake alone without any interpellation: now the mercy of the Almighty, purposing as well this miraculous favour to her as to his prophet, requires of her this task, which flesh and blood would have thought unreasonable. So we are wont to put hard questions to those scholars whom we would promote to higher forms. So in all achievements the difficulty of the enterprise makes way for the glory of the actor.

Happy was it for this widow that she did not shut her hand to the man of God: that she was no niggard of her last handful. Never corn or olive did so increase in growing as here in consuming. This barrel, this cruse of hers, had no bottom: *The barrel of meal wasted not; the cruse of oil failed not.* Behold, not getting, not saving, is the way to abundance, but giving. The mercy of God crowns our beneficence with the blessing of store. Who can fear want by a merciful liberality, when he sees the Sareptan had famished if she had not given, and by giving abounded? With what thankful devotion must this woman every day needs look upon her barrel and cruse, wherein she saw the mercy of God renewed to her continually! Doubtless, her soul was no less fed by faith than her body with this supernatural provision. How welcome a guest must Elijah needs be to this widow, that gave her life and her son's to her for his board! yea, that in that woful famine gave her and her son their board for his houseroom!

The dearth thus overcome, the mother looks hopefully upon her only son; promising herself much joy in his life and prosperity; when an unexpected sickness surpriseth him, and doth that which the famine but threatened. When can we hold ourselves secure from evils? No sooner is one of these sergeants compounded withal than we are arrested by another.

How ready we are to mistake the grounds of our afflictions, and to cast them upon false causes! The passionate mother cannot find whither to impute the death of her son but to the presence of Elijah, to whom she comes, distracted with perplexity; not without an unkind challenge of him from whom she had received both that life she had lost and that she had; *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come to me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?* As if her son could not have died if Elijah had not been her guest; whereas her son had died, but for him. Why should she think that the prophet had saved him from the famine to kill him with sickness? As if God

had not been free in his actions, and must needs strike by the same hands by which he preserved. She had the grace to know that her affliction was for her sin, yet was so unwise to imagine the arrearages of her iniquities had not been called for if Elijah had not been the remembrancer. He who had appeased God towards her is suspected to have incensed him.

This wrongful misconstruction was enough to move any patience. Elijah was of an hot spirit; yet his holiness kept him from fury. This challenge rather increased the zeal of his prayer than stirred his choler to the offender. He takes the dead child out of his mother's bosom, and lays him upon his own bed, and cries unto the Lord; *O Lord my God, hast thou brought evil also upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?* Instead of chiding the Sareptan, out of the fervency of his soul he humbly expostulates with his God. His only remedy is in his prayer: that which shut heaven for rain must open it for life.

Every word enforceth; first, he pleads his interest in God, *O Lord my God:* then, the quality of the patient; *a widow,* and therefore both most distressed with the loss, and most peculiar to the charge of the Almighty: then his interest, as in God, so in this patient, *with whom I sojourn;* as if the stroke were given to himself through her sides: and lastly, the quality of the punishment, *by slaying her son,* the only comfort of her life: and in all these implying the scandal that must needs arise from this event, wherever it should be noised, to the name of his God, to his own, when it should be said, "Lo how Elijah's entertainment is rewarded: surely the prophet is either impotent or unthankful!"

Neither doth his tongue move thus only. Thrice doth he stretch himself upon the dead body; as if he could wish to infuse of his own life into the child; and so often calls to his God for the restitution of that soul.

What can Elijah ask to be denied? *The Lord heard the voice of the prophet; the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.* What miracle is impossible to faithful prayers? There cannot be more difference betwixt Elijah's devotion and ours, than betwixt supernatural and ordinary acts; if he therefore obtained miraculous favours by his prayers, do we doubt of those which are within the sphere of nature and use? What could we want if we did not slack to ply heaven with our prayers?

Certainly, Elijah had not been premonished of this sudden sickness and death of the child. He who knew the remote affairs of

the world might not know what God would do within his own roof. The greatest prophet must content himself with so much of God's counsel as he will please to reveal; and he will sometimes reveal the great secrets and conceal the less, to make good both his own liberty and man's humiliation.

So much more unexpected as the stroke was, so much more welcome is the cure. How joyfully doth the man of God take the revived child into his arms and present him to his mother! how doth his heart leap within him at this proof of God's favour to him; mercy to the widow; power to the child!

What life and joy did now show itself in the face of that amazed mother, when she saw again the eyes of her son fixed upon hers; when she felt his flesh warm, his motions vital!

Now she can say to Elijah, *By this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.* Did she not till now know this? Had she not said before, *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* Were not her cruse and her barrel sufficient proofs of his divine commission? Doubtless, what her meal and oil had assured her of, the death of her son made her to doubt; and now reviving did reascertain. Even the strongest faith sometimes staggereth, and needeth new acts of heavenly supportation.

The end of miracles is confirmation of truth. It seems, had this widow's son continued dead, her belief had been buried in his grave; notwithstanding her meal and her oil, her soul had languished. The mercy of God is fain to provide new helps for our infirmities, and graciously condescends to our own terms, that we may work out our faith and salvation.

ELIJAH WITH THE BAALITES.—1 Kings xviii.

Three years and an half did Israel lie gasping under a parching drought and miserable famine.

No creature was so odious to them as Elijah; to whom they ascribed all their misery. Methinks I hear how they railed on and cursed the prophet. How much envy must the servants of God undergo for their Master! Nothing but the tongue was Elijah's, the hand was God's. The prophet did but say what God would do: I do not see them fall out with their sins that had

deserved the judgment, but with the messenger that denounced it. Baal had no fewer servants than if there had been both rain and plenty.

Elijah safely spends this storm under the lee of Sarepta. Some three years hath he lien close in that obscure corner, and lived upon the barrel and cruse which he had multiplied: at last, God calls him forth; *Go, show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.*

No rain must fall till Elijah were seen of Ahab. He carried away the clouds with him; he must bring them again. The king, the people of Israel, shall be witnesses that God will make good the word, the oath of his prophet. Should the rain have fallen in Elijah's absence, who could have known it was by his procurement? God holds the credit of his messengers precious, and neglects nothing that may grace them in the eyes of the world. Not the necessity of seven thousand religious Israelites could crack the word of one Elijah. There is nothing wherein God is more tender than in approving the veracity of himself in his ministers.

Lewd Ahab hath an holy steward. As his name was so was he, a servant of God, while his master was a slave to Baal. He that reserved seven thousand in the kingdom of Israel hath reserved an Obadiah in the court of Israel, and by him hath reserved them. Neither is it likely there had been so many free hearts in the country if religion had not been secretly backed in the court. It is a great happiness when God gives favour and honour to the virtuous.

Elijah did not lie more close in Sarepta than Obadiah did in the court. He could not have done so much service to the Church if he had not been as secret as good. Policy and religion do as well together as they do ill asunder. The dove without the serpent is easily caught; the serpent without the dove stings deadly. Religion without policy is too simple to be safe; policy without religion is too subtle to be good: their match makes themselves secure and many happy.

O degenerated estate of Israel! any thing was now lawful there, saving piety. It is well if God's prophets can find an hole to hide their heads in. They must needs be hard driven when fifty of them are fain to crowd together into one cave. There they had both shade and repast. Good Obadiah hazards his own life to preserve theirs, and spends himself in that extreme dearth

upon their necessary diet. Bread and water was more now than otherwhile wine and delicates. Whether shall we wonder more at the mercy of God in reserving an hundred prophets, or in thus sustaining them being reserved? when did God ever leave his Israel unfurnished of some prophets? when did he leave his prophets unprovided of some Obadiah? How worthy art thou, O Lord, to be trusted with thine own charge! While there are men upon earth, or birds in the air, or angels in heaven, thy messengers cannot want provision.

Goodness carries away trust where it cannot have imitation. Ahab divides with Obadiah the survey of the whole land. They two set their own eyes on work for the search of water, of pasture, to preserve the horses and mules alive.

O the poor and vain cares of Ahab! He casts to kill the prophet, to save the cattle; he never seeks to save his own soul, to destroy idolatry: he takes thought for grass, none for mercy. Carnal hearts are ever either grovelling on the earth or delving into it; no more regarding God or their souls than if they either were not or were worthless.

Elijah hears of the progress, and offers himself to the view of them both. Here was wisdom in this courage: first, he presents himself to Obadiah ere he will be seen of Ahab, that Ahab might, upon the report of so discreet an informer, digest the expectation of his meeting; then he takes the opportunity of Ahab's presence when he might be sure Jezebel was away.

Obadiah meets the prophet; knows him; and, as if he had seen God in him, falls on his face to him whom he knew his master persecuted. Though a great peer, he had learned to honour a prophet. No respect was too much for the president of that sacred college. To the poor boarder of the Sareptan here was no less than a prostration, and *My lord Elijah* from the great high steward of Israel. Those that are truly gracious cannot be niggardly of their observances to the messengers of God.

Elijah receives the reverence, returns a charge: *Go, tell my lord, Behold, Elijah is here.* Obadiah finds this load too heavy; neither is he more stricken with the boldness than with the unkindness of this command: boldness in respect of Elijah, unkindness in respect of himself. For thus he thinks, "If Elijah do come to Ahab, he dies: if he do not come, I die. If it be known that I met him, and brought him not, it is death: if I say that he will come voluntarily, and God shall alter his intentions, it is death.

How unhappy a man am I, that must be either Elijah's executioner or my own! Were Ahab's displeasure but smoking, I might hope to quench it; but now that the flame of it hath broken forth to the notice, to the search, of all the kingdoms and nations round about, it may consume me, I cannot extinguish it. This message were for an enemy of Elijah, for a client of Baal; as for me, I have well approved my true devotion to God, my love to his prophets. What have I done, that I should be singled out either to kill Elijah or to be killed for him?" Many an hard plunge must that man needs be driven to who would hold his conscience together with the service and favour of a tyrant. It is an happy thing to serve a just master: there is no danger, no strain in such obedience.

But when the prophet binds his resolution with an oath, and clears the heart of Obadiah from all fears, from all suspicions, the good man dares be the messenger of that which he saw was decreed in heaven.

Doubtless Ahab startled to hear of Elijah coming to meet him, as one that did not more hate than fear the prophet. Well might he think, "Thus long, thus far, have I sought Elijah. Elijah would not come to seek me but under a sure guard and with some strange commission. His coarse mantle hath the advantage of my robe and sceptre. If I can command a piece of the earth, I see he can command heaven." The edge of his revenge is taken off with a doubtful expectation of the issue; and now, when Elijah offers himself to the eyes of Ahab, he who durst not strike yet durst challenge the prophet; *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* Jeroboam's hand was still in Ahab's thoughts. He holds it not so safe to smite as to expostulate. He that was the head of Israel speaks out that which was in the heart of all his people, that Elijah was the cause of all their sorrow. Alas! what hath the righteous prophet done? He taxed their sin, he foretold the judgment; he deserved it not, he inflicted it not; yet he smarts, and they are guilty. As if some fond people should accuse the herald or the trumpet as the cause of their war; or as if some ignorant peasant, when he sees his fowls bathing in his pond, should cry out of them as the causes of foul weather.

O the heroical spirit of Elijah! he stands alone amidst all the train of Ahab; and dares not only repel this charge, but retort it: *I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and*

thou hast followed Baalim. No earthly glory can daunt him who hath the clear and heartening visions of God.

This holy seer discerns the true cause of our sufferings to be our sins. Foolish men are plagued for their offences; and it is no small part of their plague that they see it not. The only common disturber of men, families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is sin. There is no such traitor to any state as the wilfully wicked. The quietest and most plausible offender is secretly seditious, and stirreth quarrels in heaven.

The true messengers of God carry authority even where they are maligned. Elijah doth at once reprove the king and require of him the improvement of his power, in gathering all Israel to Carmel, in fetching thither all the prophets of Baal.

Baal was rich in Israel while God was poor. While God hath but one hundred prophets hid closely in Obadiah's caves, Baal hath eight hundred and fifty; four hundred and fifty dispersed over the villages and towns of Israel, four hundred at the court. God's prophets are glad of bread and water while the four hundred trencher prophets of Jezebel feed on her dainties; they lurk in caves, while these lord it in the pleasantest groves. Outward prosperity is a false note of truth.

All these, with all Israel, doth Elijah require Ahab to summon unto Carmel. It is in the power of kings to command the assembly of the prophets. The prophet sues to the prince for the indiction of this synod. They are injurious to sovereignty who arrogate this power to none but spiritual hands.

How is it that Ahab is as ready to perform this charge as Elijah to move it? I dare answer for his heart, that it was not drawn with love. Was it out of the sense of one judgment and fear of another? He smarted with the dearth and drought, and well thinks Elijah would not be so round with him for nothing. Was it out of an expectation of some miraculous exploit which the prophet would do in the sight of all Israel? or was it out of the overruling power of the Almighty? *The heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleaseth.*

Israel is met together: Elijah rates them, not so much for their superstition as for their unsettledness and irresolution. One Israelite serves God, another Baal; yea, the same Israelite perhaps serves both God and Baal. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.* Nothing is more odious to God than a profane

neutrality in main oppositions of religion. To go upright in a wrong way is a less eyesore to God than to halt betwixt right and wrong. The Spirit wisheth that the Laodicean were *either hot or cold:* either temper would better be borne than neither, than both. In reconcilable differences nothing is more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but in cases of so necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, he that is on neither side is the deadliest enemy to both. Less hateful are they to God that serve him not at all than they that serve him with a rival.

Whether out of guiltiness, or fear, or uncertainty, Israel is silent; yet, while their mouth was shut, their eyes were open.

It was a fair motion of Elijah, "*I am only remaining a prophet of the Lord: Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty. Let them choose one bullock; let me choose another.* Their devotion shall be combined, mine single. *The God that consumes the sacrifice by fire from heaven, let him be God.*" Israel cannot but approve it: the prophets of Baal cannot refuse it; they had the appearance of the advantage in their number, in the favour of king and people.

O strange disputation; wherein the argument which must be used is fire; the place whence it must be fetched, heaven; the mood and figure, devotion; the conclusion, death to the overcome!

Had not Elijah, by divine instinct, been assured of the event, he durst not have put religion upon such hazard. That God commanded him this trial who meant confusion to the authors of idolatry, victory to the truth. His power shall be approved both by fire and by water; first by fire, then by water. There was no less terror in the fire than mercy in the rain. It was fit they should first be humbled by his terrors, that they might be made capable of his mercy, and by both might be won to repentance. Thus still the fears of the law make way for the influences of grace; neither do those sweet and heavenly dews descend upon the soul till way be made for them by the terrible flashes of the law.

Justly doth Elijah urge this trial. God's sacrifices were used to none but heavenly fires; whereas the base and earthly religion of the heathen contented itself with gross and natural flames.

The prophets of Baal durst not, though with faint and guilty hearts, but embrace the condition. They dress their bullock, and lay it ready upon the wood, and send out their cries to Baal from

morning until midday; *O Baal, hear us.* What a yelling was here of four hundred and fifty throats tearing the skies for an answer! what leaping was here upon the altar, as if they would have climbed up to fetch that fire which would not come down alone! Mount Carmel might give an echo to their voice, heaven gave none. In vain do they roar out and weary themselves in imploring a dumb and deaf deity.

Grave and austere Elijah holds it not too light to flout their zealous devotion. He laughs at their tears, and plays upon their earnest; *Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is travelling, or he is sleeping, and must be awaked.* Scorns and taunts are the best answers for serious idolatry. Holiness will bear us out in disdainful scoffs and bitterness against wilful superstition.

No less in the indignation at these insulting frumps, than zeal of their own safety and reputation, do these idolatrous prophets now rend their throats with inclamations; and that they may assure the beholders they were not in jest, they cut and slash themselves with knives and lancets, and solicit the fire with their blood.

How much painfulness there is in misreligion! I do not find that the true God ever required or accepted the self-tortures of his servants. He loves true inward mortification of our corruptions; he loves the subduing of our spiritual insurrections by due exercise of severe restraint; he takes no pleasure in our blood, in our carcasses. They mistake God that think to please him by destroying that nature which he hath made, and measure truth by rigour of outward extremities. Elijah drew no blood of himself, the priests of Baal did.

How fain would the devil, whom these idolaters adored, have answered the suit of his suppliants! What would that ambitious spirit have given, that, as he was cast down from heaven like lightning, so now he might have fallen down in that form upon his altar! God forbids it: all the powers of darkness can no more show one flash of fire in the air than avoid the unquenchable fire in hell. How easy were it for the power of the Almighty to cut short all the tyrannical usurpation of that wicked one, if his wisdom and justice did not find the permission thereof useful to his holy purposes.

These idolaters now, towards evening, grew so much more vehement as they were more hopeless; and at last, when neither

their shrieks nor their wounds nor their mad motions could prevail, they sit down hoarse and weary, tormenting themselves afresh with their despairs, and with the fears of bitter success of their adversary: when Elijah calls the people to him, (the witnesses of his sincere proceedings,) and, taking the opportunity both of the time, the just hour of the evening sacrifice, and of the place, a ruined altar of God now by him repaired, convinces Israel with his miracle, and more cuts these Baalites with envy than they had cut themselves with their lancets.

O holy prophet, why didst thou not save this labour? What needed these unseasonable reparations? Was there not an altar, was there not a sacrifice, ready prepared to thine hand? That which the prophets of Baal had addressed stood still waiting for that fire from thee which the founders threatened in vain. The stones were not more impure, either for their touch or their intentions; yet, such was thy detestation of idolatry, that thou abhorredst to meddle with aught which their wickedness had defiled. Even that altar whose ruins thou didst thus repair was miserected, though to the name of the true God; yet didst thou find it better to make up the breaches of that altar, which was misconsecrated to the service of thy God, than to make use of that pile which was idolatrously devoted to a false god. It cannot be but safe to keep aloof from participation with idolaters even in those things which not only in nature but in use are unclean.

Elijah lays twelve stones in his repaired altar, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. Alas! ten of these were perverted to Baal. The prophet regards not their present apostasy: he regards the ancient covenant that was made with their father Israel; he regards their first station, to which he would reduce them. He knew that the unworthiness of Israel could not make God forgetful; he would by this monument put Israel in mind of their own degeneration and forgetfulness.

He employs those many hands for the making a large trench round about the altar, and causes it to be filled with those precious remainders of water which the people would have grudged to their own mouths, neither would easily have parted with, but, as those that pour down a pailful into a dry pump, in the hope of fetching more. The altar, the trench is full. A barrelful is poured out for each of the tribes, that every tribe might be afterwards replenished.

Ahab and Israel are no less full of expectation; and now, when

God's appointed hour of the evening sacrifice was come, Elijah comes confidently to his altar, and, looking up into heaven, says, *Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again.*

The Baalites' prayers were not more tedious than Elijah's was short, and yet more pithy than short; charging God with the care of his covenant, of his truth, of his glory. It was Elijah that spake loud. O strong cries of faith, that pierce the heavens, and irresistibly make their way to the throne of grace!

Israel shall well see that Elijah's God whom they have forsaken is neither talking, nor pursuing, nor travelling, nor sleeping. Instantly the fire of the Lord falls from heaven and consumes the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licks up the water that was in the trench.

With what terror must Ahab and Israel needs see this fire rolling down out of the sky, and alighting with such fury so near their heads, heads no less fit for this flame than the sacrifice of Elijah! Well might they have thought, "How easily might this fire have dilated itself, and have consumed our bodies as well as the wood and stone, and have licked up our blood as well as that water!" I know not whether they had the grace to acknowledge the mercy of God; they could do no less than confess his power; *The Lord is God; the Lord is God.*

The iron was now hot with this heavenly fire. Elijah stays not till it cool again, but strikes immediately; *Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.*

This wager was for life. Had they prevailed in procuring this fire, and Elijah had failed of effect, his head had been forfeited unto them: now, in the contrary success, theirs are lost to him. Let no man complain that those holy hands were bloody. This sacrifice was no less pleasing to God than that other. Both the man and the act were extraordinary, and led by a peculiar instinct. Neither doth the prophet this without the assent of the supreme magistrate, who was now so affected with this miraculous work, that he could not, in the heat of that conviction, but allow the justice of such a sentence. Far be it from us to accuse God's commands or executions of cruelty. It was the ancient and peremptory charge of God, that the authors of idolatry and seduc-

tion should die the death; no eye, no hand might spare them. The prophet doth but move the performance of that law which Israel could not without sin have omitted. It is a merciful and thankworthy severity to rid the world of the ringleaders of wickedness.

ELIJAH RUNNING BEFORE AHAB, FLYING FROM JEZEBEL.

1 Kings xviii, xix.

I hear no news of the four hundred prophets of the groves. They lie close under the wing of Jezebel, under their pleasing shades; neither will be suffered to undergo the danger of this trial. The carcasses of their fellows help to fill up the half-dry channel of Kishon.

Justice is no sooner done than Ahab hears news of mercy from Elijah; *Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.* Their meeting was not more harsh than their parting was friendly. It seems Ahab had spent all that day fasting, in an eager attendance of those conflicting prophets. It must needs be late ere the execution could be done. Elijah's part began not till the evening. So far must the king of Israel be from taking thought for the massacre of those four hundred and fifty Baalites, that now *he may go eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a cheerful heart;* for God accepteth this work, and testifies it in the noise of much rain. Every drop of that idolatrous blood was answered with a shower of rain, with a stream of water, and plenty poured down in every shower. A sensible blessing follows the impartial strokes of severe justice. Nothing is more cruel than an unjust piety.

No ears but Elijah's could as yet perceive a sound of rain. The clouds were not yet gathered, the vapours were not yet risen, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Those that are of God's counsel can discern either favours or judgments afar off. The slack apprehensions of carnal hearts make them hard to believe that as future which the quick and refined senses of the faithful receive as present.

Ahab goes up to his repast; Elijah goes up to his prayers. That day had been painful to him; the vehemency of his spirit draws him to a neglect of his body. The holy man climbs up to

the top of Carmel, that now he may talk with his God alone; neither is he sooner ascended than he casts himself down upon the earth. He bows his knees to God, and bows his face down to his knees; by this humble posture acknowledging his awful respects to that Majesty which he implored. We cannot prostrate our bodies or souls too low to that infinitely glorious Deity who is the Creator of both.

His thoughts were more high than his body was low. What he said we know not; we know that what he said opened the heavens, that for three years and an half had been shut up.

God had said before, *I will send rain upon the earth;* yet Elijah must pray for what God did promise. The promises of the Almighty do not discharge our prayers, but suppose them. He will do what he undertakes, but we must sue for that which we would have him do. Our petitions are included in the decrees, in the engagements of God.

The prophet had newly seen and caused the fire to descend immediately out of heaven; he doth not look the water should do so. He knew that the rain must come from the clouds, and that the clouds must arise from vapours, and those vapours from the sea; thence doth he expect them. But, as not willing that the thoughts of his fixed devotion should be distracted, he doth not go himself, only sends his servant to bring him the news of his success.

At the first sight nothing appears. Seven times must he walk to that prospect; and not till his last view can discern aught. All that while is the prophet in his prayers, neither is any whit daunted with that delay. Hope holds up the head of our holy desires, and perseverance crowns it. If we receive not an answer to our suits at the sixth motion, we may not be out of countenance, but must try the seventh.

At last a little cloud arises out of the sea, of an handbreadth. So many, so fervent prayers cannot but pull water out of heaven as well as fire. Those sighs reflect upon the earth, and from the earth reflect upon heaven, from heaven rebound upon the sea, and raise vapours up thence to heaven again.

If we find that our prayers are heard for the substance, we may not cavil at the quantity. Even an handbroad cloud contents Elijah, and fills his heart full of joy and thankfulness. He knew well this meteor was not at the biggest; it was newly born of the womb of the waters, and in some minutes of age must grow to a

large stature; stay but a while, and heaven is covered with it. From how small beginnings have greater matters risen! It is no otherwise in all the gracious proceedings of God with the soul. Scarce sensible are those first works of his Spirit in the heart which grow up at last to the wonder of men and applause of angels.

Well did Elijah know that God, who is perfection itself, would not defile his hand with an inchoate and scanted favour: as one therefore that foresaw the face of heaven overspread with this cloudy spot, he sends to Ahab to hasten his chariot, that the rain stop him not. It is long since Ahab feared this let. Never was the news of a danger more welcome. Doubtless the king of Israel, while he was at his diet, looked long for Elijah's promised showers: "Where is the rain whose sound the prophet heard? how is it that his ears were so much quicker than our eyes? we saw his fire to our terror: how gladly would we see his waters!" when now the servant of Elijah brings him news from heaven that the clouds were setting forward, and, if he hastened not, would be before him.

The wind arises, the clouds gather, the sky thickens; Ahab betakes him to his chariot, Elijah girds up his loins and runs before him. Surely the prophet could not want the offer of more ease in his passage; but he will be for the time Ahab's lacquey, that the king and all Israel may see his humility no less than his power, and may confess that the glory of those miracles hath not made him insolent. He knew that his very sight was monitory; neither could Ahab's mind be beside the miraculous works of God while his eye was upon Elijah; neither could the king's heart be otherwise than well affected towards the prophet while he saw that himself and all Israel had received a new life by his procurement.

But what news was here for Jezebel! Certainly Ahab minced nothing of the report of all those astonishing accidents. If but to salve up his own honour in the death of those Baalites, he made the best of Elijah's merits: he told of his challenge, conflict, victory; of the fire that fell down from heaven; of the conviction of Israel; of the unavoidable execution of the prophets; of the prediction and fall of those happy showers; and, lastly, of Elijah's officious attendance.

Who would not have expected that Jezebel should have said, "It is no striving, no dallying with the Almighty. No reasonable

creature can doubt, after so prodigious a decision. God hath won us from heaven, he must possess us. Justly are our seducers perished. None but the God that can command fire and water shall be ours: there is no prophet but his."

But she contrarily, instead of relenting, rageth; and sends a message of death to Elijah: *So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.* Neither scourges nor favours can work any thing with the obstinately wicked.

All evil hearts are not equally disaffected to good. Ahab and Jezebel were both bad enough, yet Ahab yields to that work of God which Jezebel stubbornly opposeth; Ahab melts with that water, with that fire, wherewith Jezebel is hardened; Ahab was bashfully, Jezebel audaciously impious. The weaker sex is ever most commonly stronger in passion, and more vehemently carried with the sway of their desires, whether to good or evil. She swears and stamps at that whereat she should have trembled; she swears by those gods of hers which were not able to save their prophets, that she will kill the prophet of God, who had scorned her gods and slain her prophets.

It is well that Jezebel could not keep counsel: her threat preserved him whom she had meant to kill. The wisdom and power of God could have found evasions for his prophet in her greatest secrecy; but now he needs no other means of rescue but her own lips.

She is no less vain than the gods she swears by. In spite of her fury and her oath and her gods, Elijah shall live. At once shall she find herself frustrate and forsworn. She is now ready to bite her tongue, to eat her heart for anger, at the disappointment of her cruel vow. It were no living for godly men if the hands of tyrants were allowed to be as bloody as their hearts. Men and devils are under the restraint of the Almighty; neither are their designs more lavish than their executions short.

Holy Elijah flees for his life. We hear not of the command of God, but we would willingly presuppose it. So divine a prophet should do nothing without God. His heels were no new refuge. As nowhere safe within the ten tribes, he flees to Beersheba, in the territories of Judah. As not there safe from the machinations of Jezebel, he flees alone one day's journey into the wilderness; there he sits him down under a juniper tree; and, as weary of life no less than of his way, wishes to rise no more: *It is enough*

now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

O strange and uncouth mutation! What is this we hear? Elijah fainting and giving up! That heroical spirit dejected and prostrate! He that durst say to Ahab's face, *It is thou, and thy father's house, that troubleth Israel;* he that could raise the dead, open and shut the heavens, fetch down both fire and water, with his prayers; he that durst chide and contest with all Israel, that durst kill the four hundred and fifty Baalites with the sword; doth he shrink at the frowns and threats of a woman? doth he wish to be rid of his life because he feared to lose it? Who can expect an undaunted constancy from flesh and blood when Elijah fails? The strongest and holiest saint upon earth is subject to some qualms of fear and infirmity. To be always and unchangeably good is proper only to the glorious spirits in heaven. Thus the wise and holy God will have his power perfected in our weakness. It is in vain for us, while we carry this flesh about us, to hope for so exact health as not to be cast down sometimes with fits of spiritual distemper.

It is no new thing for holy men to wish for death. Who can either marvel at or blame the desire of advantage? For the weary traveller to long for rest, the prisoner for liberty, the banished for home, it is so natural, that the contrary disposition were monstrous. The benefit of the change is a just motive to our appetition; but to call for death out of a satiety of life, out of an impatience of suffering, is a weakness unbeseeming a saint. It is not enough, O Elijah; God hath more work yet for thee. Thy God hath more honoured thee than thy fathers, and thou shalt live to honour him.

Toil and sorrow have lulled the prophet asleep under his juniper tree; that wholesome shade was well chosen for his repose. While death was called for, the cousin of death comes unbidden.

The angel of God waits on him in that hard lodging. No wilderness is too solitary for the attendance of those blessed spirits. As he is guarded, so is he awaked, by that messenger of God; and stirred up from his rest to his repast. While he slept, his breakfast is made ready for him by those spiritual hands; *there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head.* O the never-ceasing care and providence of the Almighty; not to be barred by any place, by any condition! When means are wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourselves, when to God,

even then doth he follow us with his mercy, and cast favours upon us beyond, against expectation.

What variety of purveyance doth he make for his servant! One while the ravens, then the Sareptan, now the angel shall be his caterer; none of them without a miracle. Those other provided for him waking, this sleeping. O God, the eye of thy providence is not dimmer, the hand of thy power is not shorter; only teach thou us to serve thee, to trust thee.

Needs must the prophet eat and drink and sleep with much comfort while he saw that he had such a guardian, attendance, purveyor; and now the second time is he raised by that happy touch to his meal and his way: *Arise, and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.* What needed he to travel farther, since that divine power could as well protect him in the wilderness as in Horeb? What needed he to eat, since he that meant to sustain him forty days with one meal might as well have sustained him without it? God is a most free agent; neither will he be tied to the terms of human regularities: it is enough that he knows and approves the reasons of his own choice and commands.

Once in forty days and nights shall Elijah eat, to teach us what God can do with little means; and but once, to teach us what he can do without means: once shall the prophet eat; *Man lives by bread:* and but once; *Man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*

Moses, Elijah, our Saviour, fasted each of them forty days and forty nights; the three great fasters met gloriously in Tabor. I do not find where God ever honoured any man for feasting. It is abstinence, not fulness, that makes a man capable of heavenly visions, of divine glory.

The journey was not of itself so long; the prophet took those ways, those hours which his heart gave him.

In the very same mount where Moses first saw God shall Elijah see him. One and the same cave, as is very probable, was the receptacle to both. It could not be but a great confirmation of Elijah, to renew the sight of those sensible monuments of God's favour and protection to his faithful predecessor. Moses came to see God in the bush of Horeb; God came to find Elijah in the cave of Horeb; *What doest thou here, Elijah?*

The place was directed by a providence, not by a command. He is hid sure enough from Jezebel; he cannot be hid from the all-seeing eye of God. *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or*

whither shall I fly from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmost parts of the sea; even there shall thine hand find me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Twice hath God propounded the same question to Elijah, once in the heart, once in the mouth of the cave; twice doth the prophet answer in the same words. Had the first answer satisfied, the question had not been redemanded. Now, that sullen answer which Elijah gave in the darkness of the cave is challenged into the light, not without an awful preface.

The Lord first passeth by him with the terrible demonstrations of his power; *A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake the rocks in pieces.* The tearing blast was from God; God was not in it: so was he in it as in his other extraordinary works; not so in it as by it to impart himself to Elijah. It was the usher, not the carriage, of God.

After the wind came an earthquake, more fearful than it. That did but move the air: this, the earth; that beat upon some prominences of earth; this shook it from the centre.

After the earthquake came a fire, more fearful than either. The other affected the ear, the feeling; but this lets in horror into the soul by the eye, the quickest and most apprehensive of the senses. Elijah shall see God's mighty power in the earth, air, fire, before he hear him in the soft voice.

All these are but boisterous harbingers of a meek and still word. In that God was. Behold, in that gentle and mild breath there was omnipotency; there was but powerfulness in those fierce representations. There is not always the greatest efficacy where is the greatest noise. God loves to make way for himself by terror, but he conveys himself to us in sweetness. It is happy for us, if, after the gusts and flashes of the law, we have heard the soft voice of evangelical mercy.

In this very mount, with the same horror, God had delivered his law to Moses and Israel. It is no marvel if Elijah wrapt his face in his mantle. His obedience draws him forth to the mouth of the cave, his fear still hides his head. Had there not been much courage in the prophet's faith, he had not stood out these affrightful forerunners of the divine presence, though with his face covered. The very angels do no less before that all-glorious Majesty than vail themselves with their wings: far be it from us

once to think of that infinite and omnipotent Deity without an humble awfulness.

Fear changes not the tenor of Elijah's answer. He hath not left one word behind him in the cave: *I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.*

I hear not a direct answer from the prophet to the demand of God: then he had said, "I run away from the threats of Jezebel; and here I hide my head from her malicious pursuit." His guiltiness would not let him speak out all. He had rather say, *I have been jealous for the Lord God of hosts,* than, "I was fearful of Jezebel." We are all willing to make the best of our own case. But what he wants of his own accusation he spends upon the complaint of Israel. Neither doth he more bemoan himself than exclaim against them as apostates from God's covenant, violaters of his altars, murderers of his prophets. It must needs be a desperate condition of Israel that drives Elijah to indict them before the throne of God. That tongue of his was used to plead for them, to sue for their pardon; it could not be but a forcible wickedness that makes it their accuser.

Those idolatrous Israelites were well forward to reformation. The fire and rain from heaven at the prayers of Elijah had won them to a scorn of Baal; only the violence of Jezebel turned the stream; and now they are resettled in impiety, and persecute him for an enemy whom they almost adored for a benefactor; otherwise Elijah had not complained of what they had been. Who would think it? Jezebel can do more than Elijah! No miracle is so prevalent with the vulgar as the sway of authority, whether to good or evil.

Thou art deceived, O Elijah. Thou art not left alone; neither is all Israel tainted. God hath children and prophets in Israel, though thou see them not. Those clear eyes of the seer discern not the secret story of God. They looked not into Obadiah's caves; they looked not into the closets of the religious Israelites. He that sees the heart can say, *I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.* According to the fashion of the wealthy, God pleaseth himself in hidden treasures. It is enough that his own eyes behold his riches. Never did he, never

will he leave himself unfurnished with holy clients in the midst of the foulest depravations of his Church. The sight of his faithful ones hath sometimes been lost, never the being. Do your worst, O ye gates of hell, God will have his own. He that could have more will have some. That foundation is sure, *God knoweth who are his.*

It was a true cordial for Elijah's solitariness, that he had seven thousand invisible abettors; neither is it a small comfort to our weakness to have companions in good.

For the wickedness of Israel God hath another receipt; the oil of royal and prophetical unction. Elijah must anoint Hazael king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, Elisha for his successor. All these shall revenge the quarrels of God and him; one shall begin, the other shall prosecute, the third shall perfect the vengeance upon Israel.

A prophet shall avenge the wrongs done to a prophet. Elisha is found, not in his study, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but a plough. His father Shaphat was a rich farmer in Abel-Meholah; himself was a good husband; not trained up in the schools of the prophets, but in the thrifty trade of tillage: and behold this was the man whom God will pick out of all Israel for a prophet. God seeth not as man seeth; neither doth he choose men before they are fit, but therefore he fits them because he hath chosen them: his call is above all earthly institution.

I hear not of aught that Elijah said; only he casts his cloke upon Elisha in the passage. That mantle, that act was vocal. Together with this sign God's instinct teacheth this amazed son of Shaphat that he was designed to an higher work, to break up the fallow grounds of Israel by his prophetical function. He finds a strange virtue in that robe; and, as if his heart were changed with that habit, forgets his team, and runs after Elijah, and sues for the leave of a farewell to his parents ere he had any but a dumb command to follow. The secret call of God offers an inward force to the heart, and insensibly draws us beyond the power of our resistance. Grace is no enemy to good nature. Well may the respects to our earthly parents stand with our duties to our Father in heaven.

I do not see Elisha wring his hands and deplore his condition, that he shall leave the world and follow a prophet, but for the joy of that change he makes a feast. Those oxen, those utensils of

husbandry, whereon his former labours had been bestowed, shall now be gladly devoted to the celebration of that happy day wherein he is honoured with so blessed an employment. If with desire, if with cheerfulness, we do not enter into the works of our heavenly Master, they are not like to prosper in our hands. He is not worthy of this spiritual station who holds not the service of God his highest, his richest preferment.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK XIX.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

EDWARD, LORD DENNY,[a]

BARON OF WALTHAM,

MY BOUNTIFUL AND DEARLY HONOURED PATRON.

Right Honourable:—None can challenge so much right in these Meditations as your lordship, under whose happy shade they received their first conception. Under this juniper of yours have I, not driven by force, but drawn by pleasure, slept thus long, sweetly, safely, and have received these angelical touches. How justly may your lordship claim the fruits of your own favours! Your careful studies in the Book of God are fit to be exemplary; which have so enriched you, that your teacher shall gain. In this reach of divine thoughts you shall see Benhadad's insolence taken down by Ahab's victory; an humble, though idolatrous, Israelite carrying it from an insulting pagan: you shall see in Ahab the impotent passions of greatness; in Naboth bleeding honesty; in Jezebel bloody hypocrisy, cruel craft, plotting from hell, pretending from heaven. You shall see the woful success of an unjust mercy; Ahab forfeiting what he gave; killed by him whom he should have killed. You shall see resolute Micaiah opposing the mercenary synod of prophets, a beaten victor, an imprisoned freeman. You shall see Ahaziah falling through his grate; Elijah climbing up his mount, mounting up to his glory; fetching fire from heaven, fetched by a fiery chariot to heaven; Elisha, the heir of his mantle, of his spirit, no less marvellous in his beneficences, in his revenges. What

[a] [See Dedication prefixed to Book III.]

do I foretell all? Methinks I feel myself too like an Italian host thus to meet your lordship on the way, and to promise beforehand your fare and entertainment: let it please your lordship rather to see and allow your cheer. Indeed, the feast is God's, and not mine; wherein store strives with delicacy. If my cookery hurt it not, it is enough. Through your hands I commend it to the world; as I do your lordship and my honourable good lady to the gracious protection of the Almighty, justly vowing myself

Your lordship's, in all faithful observance for ever to command,

JOS. HALL.

AHAB AND BENHADAD.—1 Kings xx.

There is nothing more dangerous for any state than to call in foreign powers for the suppressing of an homebred enemy. The remedy hath oft in this case proved worse than the disease. Asa, king of Judah, implores the aid of Benhadad the Syrian against Baasha king of Israel. That stranger hath good colour to set his foot in some outskirt towns of Israel; and now these serve him but for the handsel of more. Such sweetness doth that Edomite find in the soil of Israel, that his ambition will not take up with less than all. He that entered as a friend will proceed as a conqueror; and now aims at no less than Samaria itself, the heart, the head of the ten tribes. There was no cause to hope for better success of so perfidious a league with an infidel.

Who can look for other than war when he sees Ahab and Jezebel in the throne, Israel in the groves and temples of Baalim? The ambition of Benhadad was not so much guilty of this war as the idolatry of that wicked nation. How can they expect peace from earth who do wilfully fight against heaven? Rather will the God of hosts arm the brute, the senseless creatures against Israel, than he will suffer their defiance unrevenged.

Ahab and Benhadad are well matched, an idolatrous Israelite with a paganish Idumæan. Well may God plague each with other who means vengeance to them both.

Ahab finds himself hard pressed with the siege, and therefore is glad to enter into treaties of peace. Benhadad knows his own strength, and offers insolent conditions: *Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.* It is a fearful thing to be in the mercy of an enemy. In case of hostility, might will carve for itself.

Ahab now, after the division of Judah, was but half a king;

Benhadad had two and thirty kings to attend him. What equality was in this opposition? Wisely doth Ahab therefore, as a reed in a tempest, stoop to this violent charge of so potent an enemy; *My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.* It is not for the overpowered to capitulate. Weakness may not argue, but yield.

Tyranny is but drawn on by submission; and where it finds fear and dejection, insulteth. Benhadad, not content with the sovereignty of Ahab's goods, calls for the possession. Ahab had offered the dominion with reservation of his subordinate interest; he will be a tributary, so he may be an owner: Benhadad imperiously, besides the command, calls for the propriety[a], and suffers not the king of Israel to enjoy those things at all which he would enjoy but under the favour of that predominancy.

Overstrained subjection turns desperate. If conditions be imposed worse than death, there needs no long disputation of the remedy. The elders of Israel, whose share was proportionably in this danger, hearten Ahab to a denial; which yet comes out so fearfully, as that it appears rather extorted by the peremptory indignation of the people, than proceeding out of any generosity of his spirit; neither doth he say, "I will not," but, *I may not.*

The proud Syrian, who would have taken it in foul scorn to be denied though he had sent for all the heads of Israel, snuffs up the wind like the wild ass in the wilderness, and brags and threats and swears: *The gods do so to me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.* Not the men, not the goods only of Samaria shall be carried away captive, but the very earth whereon it stands; and this with how much ease! No soldier shall need to be charged with more than a handful to make a valley where the mother city of Israel once stood.

O vain boaster! in whom I know not whether pride or folly be more eminent. Victory is to be achieved, not to be sworn. Future events are no matter of an oath. Thy gods (if they had been) might have been called as witnesses of thy intentions; not of that success whereof thou wouldest be the author without them. Thy gods can do nothing to thee, nothing for thee, nothing for themselves. All thine Aramites shall not carry away one corn of sand out of Israel, except it be upon the soles of their feet in their

[a] [proprietorship.]

shameful flight: it is well if they can carry back those skins that they brought thither. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.* There is no cause to fear that man that trusts in himself. Man may cast the dice of war, but the disposition of them is of the Lord.

Ahab was lewd, but Benhadad was insolent; if therefore Ahab shall be scourged with the rod of Benhadad's fear, Benhadad shall be smitten with the sword of Ahab's revenge. Of all things, God will not endure a presumptuous and self-confident vaunter.

After Elijah's flight and complaint, yet a prophet is addressed to Ahab: *Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.* Who can wonder enough at this unweariable mercy of God? After the fire and rain fetched miraculously from heaven, Ahab had promised much, performed nothing; yet again will God bless and solicit him with victory. One of those prophets whom he persecuted to death shall comfort his dejection with the news of deliverance and triumph.

Had this great work been wrought without premonition, either chance or Baal or the golden calves, had carried away the thanks: beforehand therefore shall Ahab know both the author and the means of his victory; God for the author, the two hundred thirty two young men of the princes for the means.

What are these for the vanguard, and seven thousand Israelites for the main battle, against the troops of three and thirty kings, and as many centuries of Syrians as Israel had single soldiers? An equality of number had taken away the wonder of the event; but now the God of hosts will be confessed in this issue, not the valour of men. How indifferent it is with thee, O Lord, to save by many or by few; to destroy many or few! A world is no more to thee than a man. How easy is it for thee to enable us to be more than conquerors over principalities and powers, to subdue spiritual wickednesses to flesh and blood! Through thee we can do great things; yea, we can do all things through thee that strengthenest us. Let not us want faith, we are sure there can be no want in thy power or mercy.

There was nothing in Benhadad's pavilions but drink and surfeit and jollity, as if wine should make way for blood. Security is the certain usher of destruction. We never have so much cause to fear as when we fear nothing.

This handful of Israel dares look out, upon the prophet's assurance, to the vast host of Benhadad.

It is enough for that proud pagan to sit still and command amongst his cups. To defile their fingers with the blood of so few seemed no mastery; that act would be inglorious on the part of the victors. More easily might they bring in three heads of dead enemies than one alive; imperiously enough therefore doth this boaster, out of his chair of state and ease, command, *Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.* There needs no more but *Take them:* this field is won with a word. O the vain and ignorant presumptions of wretched men, that will be reckoning without, against, their Maker!

Every Israelite kills his man; the Syrians flee, and cannot run away from death. Benhadad and his kings are more beholden to their horses than to their gods or themselves for life and safety; else they had been either taken or slain by those whom they commanded to be taken.

How easy is it for Him that made the heart to fill it with terror and consternation, even where no fear is! Those whom God hath destined to slaughter, he will smite; neither needs he any other enemy or executioner than what he finds in their own bosom. We are not the masters of our own courage or fears: both are put into us by that overruling power that created us.

Stay now, O stay, thou great king of Syria, and take with thee those forgotten handfuls of the dust of Israel. Thy gods will do so to thee, and more also, if thy followers return without their vowed burden. Learn now of the despised king of Israel from henceforth not to sound the triumph before the battle, not to boast thyself in the girding on of thy harness as in the putting off.

I hear not of either the public thanksgiving or amendment of Ahab: neither danger nor victory can change him from himself. Benhadad and he, though enemies, agree in unrepentance: the one is no more moved with mercy than the other with judgment.

Neither is God any changeling in his proceedings towards both. His judgment shall still follow the Syrian, his mercy Israel: mercy both in forewarning and redelivering Ahab, judgment in overthrowing Benhadad.

The prophet of God comes again, and both foretells the intended reencounter of the Syrian, and advises the care and pre-

paration of Israel: *Go, strengthen thyself and mark, and see what thou doest; for, at the return of the year, the king of Syria will come up against thee.* God purposeth the deliverance of Israel, yet may not they neglect their fortifications. The merciful intentions of God towards them may not make them careless. The industry and courage of the Israelites fall within the decree of their victory. Security is the bane of good success.

It is no contemning of a foiled enemy. The shame of a former disgrace and miscarriage whets his valour and sharpens it to revenge. No power is so dreadful as that which is recollected from an overthrow.

The hostility against the Israel of God may sleep, but will hardly die. If the Aramites sit still, it is but till they be fully ready for an assault: time will show that their cessation was only for their advantage. Neither is it otherwise with our spiritual adversaries; sometimes their onsets are intermitted: they tempt not always, they always hate us: their forbearance is not out of favour, but attendance of opportunity. Happy are we if, out of a suspicion of their silence, we can as busily prepare for their resistance as they do for our impugnation.

As it is a shame to be beaten, so yet the shame is less by how much the victor is greater. To mitigate the grief and indignation of Benhadad's foil his parasites ascribe it to gods, not to men; an human power could no more have vanquished him than a divine power could by him be resisted: *Their gods are gods of the hills.*

Ignorant Syrians, that name gods and confine them; varying their deities according to situations! They saw that Samaria, whence they were repelled, stood upon the hill of Shemer; they saw the temple of Jerusalem stood upon mount Sion; they knew it usual with the Israelites to sacrifice in their high places, and perhaps they had heard of Elijah's altar upon mount Carmel; and now they sottishly measure the effects of the power by the place of the worship, as if He that was omnipotent on the hill were impotent in the valley.

What doltish conceits doth blind paganism frame to itself of a godhead! As they have many gods, so finite: every region, every hill, every dale, every stream hath their several gods; and each so knows his own bounds, that he dares not offer to encroach upon the other; or if he do, buys it with loss. Who would think that so gross blockishness should find harbour in a reasonable soul? A

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man doth not alter with his station. He that wrestled strongly upon the hill loseth not his force in the plain: all places find him alike active, alike valorous; yet these barbarous Aramites shame not to imagine that of God which they would blush to affirm of their own champions. Superstition infatuates the heart out of measure, neither is there any fancy so absurd or monstrous which credulous infidelity is not ready to entertain with applause.

In how high scorn doth God take it to be thus basely undervalued by rude heathen! This very misopinion concerning the God of Israel shall cost the Syrians a shameful and perfect destruction. They may call a council of war and lay their heads together, and change their kings into captains and their hills into valleys, but they shall find more graves in the plains than in the mountains. This very misprision of God shall make Ahab, though he were more lewd, victorious. An hundred thousand Syrians shall fall in one day by those few hands of Israel; and a dead wall in Aphek, to whose shelter they fled, shall revenge God upon the rest that remained. The stones in the wall shall rather turn executioners than a blasphemous Aramite shall escape unrevenged. So much doth the jealous God hate to be robbed of his glory even by ignorant pagans, whose tongues might seem no slander!

That proud head of Benhadad, that spoke such big words of the dust of Israel, and swore by his gods that he would kill and conquer, is now glad to hide itself in a blind hole of Aphek; and now, instead of questioning the power of the God of Israel, is glad to hear of the mercy of the kings of Israel: *Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.*

There can be no more powerful attractive of humble submission than the intimation and conceit of mercy. We do at once fear and hate the inexorable. This is it, O Lord, that allures us to thy throne of grace, the knowledge of the grace of that throne. With thee is mercy and plenteous redemption; thine hand is open before our mouths, before our hearts. If we did not see thee smile upon suitors, we durst not press to thy footstool. Behold now, we know that the King of heaven, the God of Israel, is a merciful God: let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and strew ashes upon our heads, and go meet the Lord God of Israel, that he may save our souls.

How well doth this habit become insolent and blasphemous Benhadad and his followers, a rope and sackcloth! a rope for a crown, sackcloth for a robe.

Neither is there less change in the tongue: *Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live.* Even now the king of Israel said to Benhadad, *My lord, O king, I am thine: tell my lord the king, all that thou didst send for to thy servant, I will do.* Now Benhadad sends to the king of Israel, *Thy servant Benhadad said, I pray thee, let me live.* He that was erewhile a lord and king is now a servant, and he that was a servant to the king of Syria is now his lord; he that would blow away all Israel in dust is now glad to beg for his own life at the door of a despised enemy. No courage is so haughty which the God of hosts cannot easily bring under. What are men or devils in those almighty hands?

The greater the dejection was, the stronger was the motive of commiseration. That halter pleaded for life, and that plea for but a life stirred the bowels for favour. How readily did Ahab see in Benhadad's sudden misery the image of the instability of all human things, and relents at the view of so deep and passionate a submission!

Had not Benhadad said *Thy servant,* Ahab had never said *My brother.* Seldom ever was there loss in humility. How much less can we fear disparagement in the annihilating of ourselves before that Infinite Majesty!

The drowning man snatches at every twig. It is no marvel if the messengers of Benhadad catched hastily at that last of grace, and hold it fast, *Thy brother Benhadad.*

Favours are wont to draw on each other, kindnesses breed on themselves; neither need we any other persuasion to beneficence than from our own acts. Ahab calls for the king of Syria; sets him in his own chariot; treats with him of an easy yet firm league; gives him both his life and his kingdom.

Neither is the crown of Syria sooner lost than recovered. Only he that came a free prince returns tributary; only his train is clipped too short for his wings; an hundred twenty-seven thousand Syrians are abated of his guard homeward.

Blasphemy hath escaped too well. Ahab hath at once peace with Benhadad, war with God. God proclaims it by his herald, one of the sons of the prophets; not yet in his own form, but disguised both in fashion and complaint.

It was a strange suit of a prophet, *Smite me, I pray thee.* Many

a prophet was smitten, and would not; never any but this wished to be smitten. The rest of his fellows were glad to say, *Save me;* this only says, *Smite me.*

His honest neighbour, out of love and reverence, forbears to strike. "There are too many," thinks he, "that smite the prophets, though I refrain. What wrong hast thou done, that I should repay with blows? Hadst thou sued for a favour, I could not have denied thee; now thou suest for thine hurt, the denial is a favour." Thus he thought, but charity cannot excuse disobedience. Had the man of God called for blows upon his own head, the refusal had been just and thankworthy; but now that he says, *in the word of the Lord, Smite me,* this kindness is deadly: *Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee.* It is not for us to examine the charges of the Almighty. Be they never so harsh or improbable, if they be once known for his, there is no way but obedience or death. Not to smite a prophet when God commands is no less sin than to smite a prophet when God forbids. It is the divine precept or prohibition that either makes or aggravates an evil.

And if the Israelite be thus revenged that smote not a prophet, what shall become of Ahab that smote not Benhadad?

Every man is not thus indulgent. An easy request will gain blows to a prophet from the next hand; yea, and a wound in smiting.

I know not whether it were a harder task for the prophet to require a wound than for a well-meaning Israelite to give it. Both must be done. The prophet hath what he would, what he must will, a sight of his own blood; and now, disguised herewith, and with ashes upon his face, he waylays the king of Israel, and sadly complains of himself in a real parable for dismissing a Syrian prisoner delivered to his hands upon no less charge than his life, and soon receives sentence of death from his own mouth. Well was that wound bestowed that struck Ahab's soul through the flesh of the prophet. The disguise is removed. The king sees not a soldier, but a seer; and now finds that he hath unawares passed sentence upon himself. There needs no other doom than from the lips of the offender: *Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.* Had not Ahab known the will of God concerning

Benhadad, that had been mercy to an enemy which was now cruelty to himself, to Israel. His ears had heard of the blasphemies of that wicked tongue; his eyes had seen God go before him in the example of that revenge. No prince can strike so deep into his state as in not striking. In private favour there may be public unmercifulness.

AHAB AND NABOTH.—1 Kings xxi.

Naboth had a fair vineyard. It had been better for him to have had none; his vineyard yielded him the bitter grapes of death. Many a one hath been sold to death by his lands and goods; wealth hath been a snare, as to the soul, so to the life. Why do we call those goods which are many times the bane of the owner?

Naboth's vineyard lay near to the court of Jezebel; it had been better for him it had been planted in the wilderness. Doubtless this vicinity made it more commodious to the possessor, but more envious and unsafe. It was now the perpetual object of an evil eye, and stirred those desires which could neither be well denied nor satisfied. Eminency is still joined with peril, obscurity with peace. There can be no worse annoyance to an inheritance than the greatness of an evil neighbourhood. Naboth's vines stood too near the smoke of Jezebel's chimneys, too much within the prospect of Ahab's window.

Now lately had the king of Israel been twice victorious over the Syrians. No sooner is he returned home than he is overcome with evil desires. The foil he gave was not worse than that he took. There is more true glory in the conquest of our lusts than in all bloody trophies. In vain shall Ahab boast of subduing a foreign enemy while he is subdued by a domestic enemy within his own breast.

Opportunity and convenience is guilty of many a theft. Had not this ground lain so fair, Ahab had not been tempted.

His eye lets in this evil guest into the soul which now dares come forth at the mouth. *Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house; and I will give thee a better vineyard for it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.*

Yet had Ahab so much civility and justice that he would not wring Naboth's patrimony out of his hand by force, but requires it

upon a fair composition, whether of price or of exchange. His government was vicious, not tyrannical. Propriety [property] of goods was inviolably maintained by him. No less was Naboth allowed to claim a right in his vineyard than Ahab in his palace. This we owe to lawful sovereignty, to call aught our own; and well worthy is this privilege to be repaid with all humble and loyal respects.

The motion of Ahab, had it been to any other than an Israelite, had been as just, equal, reasonable, as the repulse had been rude, churlish, inhuman. It is fit that princes should receive due satisfaction in the just demands, not only of their necessities, but convenience and pleasure. Well may they challenge this retribution, to the benefit of our common peace and protection. If there be any sweetness in our vineyards, any strength in our fields, we may thank their sceptres. Justly may they expect from us the commodity, the delight of their habitation; and if we gladly yield not to their full elbowroom, both of sight and provision, we can be no other than ungrateful. Yet dares not Naboth give any other answer to so plausible a motion, than, *The Lord forbid it me, that I should give thee the inheritance of my fathers.* The honest Israelite saw violence in this ingenuity. There are no stronger commands than the requests of the great. It is well that Ahab will not wrest away this patrimony; it is not well that he desired it. The land was not so much stood upon as the law. One earth might be as good as another, and money equivalent to either. The Lord had forbidden to alien their inheritance: Naboth did not fear loss, but sin. What Naboth might not lawfully do, Ahab might not lawfully require.

It pleased God to be very punctual and cautelous both in the distinction and preservation of the entireness of these Jewish inheritances. Nothing but extreme necessity might warrant a sale of land, and that but for a time; if not sooner, yet at the jubilee it must revert to the first owner. It was not without a comfortable signification, that whosoever had once his part in the Land of Promise could never lose it.

Certainly, Ahab could not but know this divine restriction, yet doubts not to say, *Give me thy vineyard.* The unconscionable will know no other law but their profit, their pleasure. A lawless greatness hates all limitations, and abides not to hear men should need any other warrant but will.

[illegible]res not be thus tractable. How gladly would he be [illegible]nheritance, if God would acquit him from the sin! [illegible]rilfulness, but obedience, doth this faithful Israelite

hold off from this demand of his sovereign; not daring to please an earthly king with offending the heavenly. When princes command lawful things, God commands by them; when unlawful, they command against God. Passive obedience we must give; active we may not. We follow them as subordinate, not as opposite, to the Highest.

Who cannot but see and pity the straits of honest Naboth? Ahab requires what God forbids. He must fall out either with his God or his king. Conscience carries him against policy, and he resolves not to sin that he might be gracious. For a world he may not give his vineyard.

Those who are themselves godless think the holy care of others but idly scrupulous. The king of Israel could not choose but see that only God's prohibition lay in the way of his designs, not the stomach of a froward subject; yet he goes away into his house heavy and displeased, and casts himself down upon his bed, turns away his face, and refuses his meat. He hath taken a surfeit of Naboth's grapes which mars his appetite and threats his life.

How ill can great hearts endure to be crossed, though upon the most reasonable and just grounds! Ahab's place called him to the guardianship of God's law; and now his heart is ready to break, that this parcel of that law may not be broken. No marvel if he made not dainty to transgress a local statute of God who did so shamefully violate the eternal law of both tables.

I know not whether the spleen or the gall of Ahab be more affected. Whether more of anger or grief, I cannot say; but sick he is, and keeps his bed, and balks his meat, as if he should die of no other death than the salads that he would have had. O the impotent passion and insatiable desires of covetousness! Ahab is lord and king of all the territories of Israel; Naboth is the owner of one poor vineyard: Ahab cannot enjoy Israel if Naboth enjoy his vineyard. Besides Samaria, Ahab was the great lord paramount of Damascus and all Syria, the victor of him that was attended with two and thirty kings; Naboth was a plain townsman of Jezreel, the good husband of a little vineyard. Whether is the wealthier? I do not hear Naboth wish for any thing of Ahab's; I hear Ahab wishing, not without indignation of a repulse, for somewhat from Naboth. Riches and poverty is no more in the heart than in the hand. He is wealthy that is contented; he is poor that wanteth more. O rich Naboth, that carest not for all the large possessions of Ahab, so thou mayest be the lord

of thine own vineyard! O miserable Ahab, that carest not for thine own possessions whilst thou mayest not be the lord of Naboth's vineyard!

He that caused the disease sends him a physician. Satan knew of old how to make use of such helpers. Jezebel comes to Ahab's bedside, and casts cold water in his face, and puts into him spirits of her own extracting: *Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth.* Ahab wanted neither wit nor wickedness, yet is he in both a very novice to this Zidonian dame. There needs no other devil than Jezebel, whether to project evil or to work it. She chides the pusillanimity of her dejected husband, and persuades him his rule cannot be free unless it be licentious, that there should be no bounds for sovereignty but will.

Already hath she contrived to have by fraud and force what was denied to entreaty. Nothing needs but the name, but the seal of Ahab: let her alone with the rest. How present are the wits of the weaker sex for the devising of wickedness! She frames a letter in Ahab's name to the senators of Jezreel, wherein she requires them to proclaim a fast, to suborn two false witnesses against Naboth, to charge him with blasphemy against God and the king, to stone him to death. A ready payment for a rich vineyard!

Whose indignation riseth not to hear Jezebel name a fast? The great contemners of the most important laws of God yet can be content to make use of some divine both statutes and customs for their own advantage. She knew the Israelites had so much remainder of grace as to hold blasphemy worthy of death; she knew their manner was to expiate those crying sins with public humiliation; she knew that two witnesses at least must cast the offender: all these she urges to her own purpose. There is no mischief so devilish as that which is cloked with piety. Simulation of holiness doubleth a villany. This murder had not been half so foul if it had not been thus masked with a religious observation.

Besides devotion, what a fair pretence of legality is here! Blasphemy against God and his anointed may not pass unrevenged. The offender is convented before the sad and severe bench of magistracy. The justice of Israel allows not to condemn an absent, an unheard malefactor. Witnesses come forth and agree in the intentation of the crime. The judges rend their garments and strike their breasts, as grieved not more for the sin than the

punishment. Their very countenance must say, "Naboth should not die if his offence did not force our justice;" and now, he is no good subject, no true Israelite, that hath not a stone for Naboth.

Jezebel knew well to whom she wrote. Had not those letters fallen upon the times of a woful degeneration of Israel, they had received no less strong denials from the elders than Ahab had from Naboth; "God forbid that the senate of Jezreel should forge a perjury, belie truth, condemn innocency, brook corruption. Command just things; we are ready to die in the zeal of our obedience; we dare not embrue our hands in the blood of an innocent." But she knew whom she had engaged, whom she had marred by making conscious.

It were strange if they who can countenance evil with greatness should want factors for the unjustest designs. Miserable is that people whose rulers, instead of punishing, plot and encourage wickedness. When a distillation of evil falls from the head upon the lungs of any state, there must needs follow a deadly consumption.

Yet perhaps there wanted not some colour of pretence for this proceeding. They could not but hear that some words had passed betwixt the king and Naboth. Haply it was suggested that Naboth had secretly overlashed into saucy and contemptuous terms to his sovereign, such as neither might be well borne, nor yet, by reason of their privacy, legally convinced. The bench of Jezreel should but supply a form to the just matter and desert of condemnation. What was it for them to give their hand to this obscure midwifery of justice? It is enough that their king is an accuser and witness of that wrong which only their sentence can formally revenge.

All this cannot wash their hands from the guilt of blood. If justice be blind in respect of partiality, she may not be blind in respect of the grounds of execution. Had Naboth been a blasphemer or a traitor, yet these men were no better than murderers. What difference is there betwixt the stroke of magistracy and of manslaughter but due conviction?

Wickedness never spake out of a throne and complained of the defect of instruments. Naboth was it seems strictly conscionable, his fellow-citizens loose and lawless. They are glad to have gotten such an opportunity of his despatch. No clause of Ahab's letter is not observed. A fast is warned; the city is assembled; Naboth is convented, accused, confronted, sentenced, stoned; his

vineyard is escheated to the crown; Ahab takes speedy and quiet possession.

How still doth God sit in heaven and look upon the complots of treachery and villanies, as if they did not concern him! The success so answers their desires, as if both heaven and earth were their friends. It is the plague which seems the felicity of sinners to speed well in their lewd enterprises. No reckoning is brought in the midst of the meal, the end pays for all.

While Ahab is rejoicing in his new garden-plot, and promising himself contentment in this commodious enlargement, in comes Elijah, sent from God with an errand of vengeance. Methinks I see how the king's countenance changed, with what aghast eyes and pale cheeks he looked upon that unwelcome prophet. Little pleasure took he in his prospect while it was clogged with such a guest, yet his tongue begins first; *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*

Great is the power of conscience. Upon the last meeting, for aught we know, Ahab and Elijah parted friends; the prophet had lackeyed his coach, and took a peaceable leave at this town's end: now Ahab's heart told him, neither needed any other messenger, that God and his prophet were fallen out with him. His continuing idolatry, now seconded with blood, bids him look for nothing but frowns from heaven. A guilty heart can never be at peace. Had not Ahab known how ill he had deserved of God, he had never saluted his prophet by the name of an *enemy*. He had never been troubled to be found by Elijah, if his own breast had not found him out for an enemy to God.

Much good may thy vineyard do thee, O thou king of Israel. Many fair flowers and savoury herbs may thy new garden yield thee. Please thyself with thy Jezebel in the triumph over the carcass of a scrupulous subject. Let me rather die with Naboth than rejoice with thee! His turn is over, thine is to come. The stones that overwhelmed innocent Naboth were nothing to those that smite thee: *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.*

What meanest thou, O Elijah, to charge this murder upon Ahab? He kept his chamber; Jezebel wrote, the elders condemned, the people stoned; yet thou sayest, *Hast thou killed?* Well did Ahab know that Jezebel could not give this vineyard with dry hands, yet was he content to wink at what she would

do. He but sits still while Jezebel works, only his signet is suffered to walk for the sealing of this unknown purchase. Those that are trusted with authority may offend no less in connivency or neglect than others in act, in participation. Not only command, consent, countenance, but very permission feoffs public persons in those sins which they might and will not prevent.

God loves to punish by retaliation. Naboth and Ahab shall both bleed: Naboth, by the stones of the Jezreelites; Ahab, by the shafts of the Aramites: the dogs shall taste of the blood of both. What Ahab hath done in cruelty he shall suffer in justice. The case and the end make the difference; happy on Naboth's side, on Ahab's woful: Naboth bleeds as a martyr; Ahab as a murderer. Whatever is Ahab's condition, Naboth changes a vineyard on earth for a kingdom in heaven. Never any wicked man gained by the persecution of an innocent: never any innocent man was a loser by suffering from the wicked.

Neither was this judgment personal, but hereditary; *I will take away thy posterity; and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.* Ahab shall not need to take thought for the traducing of this ill-gotten inheritance; God hath taken order for his heirs, whom his sin hath made no less the heirs of his curse than of his body. Their father's cruelty to Naboth hath made them, together with their mother Jezebel, dogs' meat. The revenge of God doth at last make amends for the delay. Whether now is Naboth's vineyard paid for? The man that had *sold himself to work wickedness* yet rues the bargain.

I do not hear Ahab, as bad as he was, revile or threaten the prophet; but he rends his clothes, and wears and lies in sackcloth, and fasts, and walks softly. Who that had seen Ahab would not have deemed him a true penitent? All this was the visor of sorrow, not the face; or if the face, not the heart; or if the sorrow of the heart, yet not the repentance; a sorrow for the judgment, not a repentance for the sin. The very devils howl to be tormented. Grief is not ever a sign of grace. Ahab rends his clothes; he did not rend his heart: he puts on sackcloth, not amendment: he lies in sackcloth, but he lies in his idolatry: he walks softly, he walks not sincerely. *Worldly sorrow causeth death.* Happy is that grief for which the soul is the holier.

Yet what is this I see? This very shadow of repentance carries

away mercy. It is no small mercy to defer an evil. Even Ahab's humiliation shall prorogue the judgment. Such as the penitence was, such shall be the reward; a temporary reward of a temporary penitence. As Ahab might be thus sorrowful, and never the better; so he may be thus favoured, and never the happier. O God, how graciously art thou ready to reward a sound and holy repentance, who art thus indulgent to a carnal and servile dejection!

AHAB AND MICAIAH, OR THE DEATH OF AHAB.

1 Kings xxii; 2 Chronicles xviii.

Who would have looked to have heard any more of the wars of the Syrians with Israel after so great a slaughter, after so firm a league; a league, not of peace only, but of brotherhood? The halters, the sackcloth of Benhadad's followers were worn out, as of use, so of memory; and now they are changed for iron and steel.

It is but three years that this peace lasts; and now that war begins which shall make an end of Ahab. The king of Israel rues his unjust mercy. According to the word of the prophet, that gift of a life was but an exchange. Because Ahab gave Benhadad his life, Benhadad shall take Ahab's. He must forfeit in himself what he hath given to another. There can be no better fruit of too much kindness to infidels.

It was one article of the league betwixt Ahab and his brother Benhadad, that there should be a speedy restitution of all the Israelitish cities. The rest are yielded; only Ramoth Gilead is held back, unthankfully, injuriously. He that begged but his life, receives his kingdom, and now rests not content with his own bounds. Justly doth Ahab challenge his own; justly doth he move a war to recover his own from a perfidious tributary. The lawfulness of actions may not be judged by the events, but by the grounds. The wise and holy Arbiter of the world knows why, many times, the better cause hath the worse success. Many a just business is crossed for a punishment to the agent.

Yet Israel and Judah were now pieced in friendship. Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, had made affinity with Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel; and, besides a personal visitation, joins his forces with his new kinsman against an old confederate.

Judah had called in Syria against Israel, and now Israel calls in Judah against Syria. Thus rather should it be. It is fit that the more pure church should join with the more corrupt against a common paganish enemy.

Jehoshaphat hath matched with Ahab, not with a divorce of his devotion. He will fight, not without God; *Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day.* Had he done thus sooner, I fear Athaliah had never called him *father*. This motion was news in Israel; it was wont to be said, "Inquire of Baal." The good king of Judah will bring religion into fashion in the court of Israel. Ahab had inquired of his counsellors; what needed he be so devout as to inquire of his prophets? Only Jehoshaphat's presence made him thus godly. It is an happy thing to converse with the virtuous; their counsel and example cannot but leave some tincture behind them of a good profession, if not of piety. Those that are truly religious dare not but take God with them in all their affairs; with him they can be as valiant as timorous without him.

Ahab had clergy enough, such as it was. Four hundred prophets of the groves were reserved from appearing to Elijah's challenge. These are now consulted by Ahab. They live to betray the life of him who saved theirs.

These care not so much to inquire what God would say as what Ahab would have them say. They saw which way the king's heart was bent, that way they bent their tongues: *Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the king.* False prophets care only to please. A plausible falsehood passes with them above an harsh truth. Had they seen Ahab fearful they had said, "Peace, peace!" Now they see him resolute, "War and victory." It is a fearful presage of ruin when the prophets conspire in assentation.

Their number, consent, confidence, hath easily won credit with Ahab. We do all willingly believe what we wish. Jehoshaphat is not so soon satisfied. These prophets were, it is like, obtruded to him, a stranger, for the true prophets of the true God. The judicious king sees cause to suspect them; and now, perceiving at what altars they served, hates to rest in their testimony; *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?* One single prophet speaking from the oracles of God is more worth than four hundred Baalites. Truth may not ever be measured by the poll. It is not number but weight that must

carry it in a council of prophets. A solid verity in one mouth is worthy to preponderate light falsehood in a thousand.

Even king Ahab, as bad as he was, kept tale of his prophets; and could give account of one that was missing. *There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.*

It is very probable that Micaiah was that disguised prophet who brought to Ahab the fearful message of displeasure and death for dismissing Benhadad, for which he was ever since fast in prison, deep in disgrace.

O corrupt heart of self-condemned Ahab! If Micaiah spake true to thee, how was it evil? If others said false, how was it good? And if Micaiah spake from the Lord, why dost thou hate him?

This hath wont to be the ancient lot of truth, censure and hatred; censure of the message, hatred of the bearer. To carnal ears the message is evil if unpleasing; and if plausible, good; if it be sweet, it cannot be poison; if bitter, it cannot be wholesome. The distemper of the receiver is guilty of this misconceit. In itself, every truth, as it is good, so amiable; every falsehood, loathsome as evil. A sick palate cries out of the taste of those liquors which are well allowed of the healthful. It is a sign of a good state of the soul when every vendure can receive his proper judgment.

Wise and good Jehoshaphat dissuades Ahab from so hard an opinion, and sees cause so much more to urge the consultation of Micaiah by how much he finds him more unpleasing. The king of Israel, to satisfy the importunity of so great and dear an ally, sends an officer for Micaiah. He knew well belike where to find him within those four walls where unjust cruelty had disposed of that innocent seer. Out of the obscurity of the prison is the poor prophet fetched in the light of so glorious a consession of two kings, who thought this convocation of prophets not unworthy of their greatest representation of state and majesty. There he finds Zedekiah the leader of that false crew, not speaking only, but acting his prediction. Signs were no less used by the prophets than words. This arch flatterer hath made him horns of iron: the horn is forcible, the iron irresistible: by an irresistible force shall Ahab push the Syrians, as if there were more certainty in this man's hands than in his tongue.

If this son of Chenaanah had not had a forehead of brass for impudency, and a heart of lead for flexibleness to humours and times, he had never devised these horns of iron wherewith his king was gored unto blood. Howsoever, it is enough for him that he is believed, that he is seconded. All the great inquest of these prophets gave up their verdict by this foreman: not one of four hundred dissented. Unanimity of opinion in the greatest ecclesiastical assemblies is not ever an argument of truth: there may be as common and as firm agreement in error.

The messenger that came for Micaiah, like a carnal friend, sets him in a way of favour; tells him what the rest said, how they pleased; how unsafe it would be for him to vary, how beneficial to assent. Those that adore earthly greatness think every man should dote upon their idols, and hold no terms too high for their ambitious purposes.

Faithful Micaiah scorns the motion. He knows the price of the word, and contemns it; *As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.* Neither fears nor favours can tempt the holily resolute; they can trample upon dangers or honours with a careless foot; and whether they be smiled or frowned on by the great, dare not either alter or conceal their errand.

The question is moved to Micaiah. He at first so yields that he contradicts; yields in words, contradicts in pronunciation. The syllables are for them, the sound against them. Ironies deny strongest in affirming. And now, being pressed home, he tells them that God had showed him those sheep of Israel should ere long by this means want their shepherd. The very resemblance to a good prince had been affective. The sheep is an helpless creature, not able either to guard or guide itself. All the safety, all the direction of it, is from the keeper, without whom every cur chases and worries it, every track seduceth it. Such shall Israel soon be if Ahab be ruled by his prophets.

The king of Israel doth not believe, but quarrel; not at himself, who had deserved evil, but at the prophet who foresignified it; and is more careful that the king of Judah should mark how true he had foretold concerning the prophet, than how the prophet had foretold concerning him.

Bold Micaiah, as no whit discouraged with the unjust checks of greatness, doubles his prediction; and by a second vision particulariseth the means of this dangerous error. While the two kings sat majestically in their thrones, he tells them of a more

glorious throne than theirs, whereon he saw the King of gods sitting. While they were compassed with some hundreds of prophets and thousands of subjects and soldiers, he tells them of all the host of heaven attending that other throne. While they were deliberating of a war, he tells them of a God of heaven, justly decreeing the judgment of a deadly deception to Ahab.

The decree of the Highest is not more plainly revealed than expressed parabolically. The wise and holy God is represented, after the manner of men, consulting of that ruin which he intended to the wicked king of Israel. That uncreated and infinite wisdom needs not the advice of any finite and created powers to direct him; needs not the assent and aid of any spirit for his execution; much less of an evil one: yet here an evil spirit is brought in by way of vision mixed with parable, proffering the service of his lie, accepted, employed, succesful.

These figures are not void of truth. The action and event are reduced to a decree: the decree is shadowed out by the resemblance of human proceedings. All evil motions and counsels are originally from that malignant spirit. That evil spirit could have no power over men but by the permission, by the decree, of the Almighty. That Almighty, as he is no author of sin, so he ordinates all evil to good. It is good that is just; it is good that one sin should be punished by another. Satan is herein no other than the executioner of that God who is as far from infusing evil as from not revenging it.

Now Ahab sees the ground of that applaused consent of his rabble of prophets. One evil spirit hath no less deceived them than they their master. He is one; therefore he agrees with himself: he is evil; therefore both he and they agree in deceit.

O the noble and undaunted spirit of Micaiah! Neither the thrones of the kings nor the number of the prophets could abate one word of his true, though displeasing message. The king of Israel shall hear that he is misled by liars; they, by a devil.

Surely, Jehoshaphat cannot but wonder at so unequal a contention, to see one silly prophet affronting four hundred; with whom, lest confidence should carry it, behold Zedekiah more bold, more zealous. If Micaiah have given him with his fellows the lie, he gives Micaiah the fist.

Before these two great guardians of peace and justice, swaggering Zedekiah smites Micaiah on the face, and with the blow expostulates: *Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me*

to speak unto thee? For a prophet to smite a prophet in the face of two kings was intolerably insolent. The act was much unbeseeming the person, more the presence. Prophets may reprove, they may not strike. It was enough for Ahab to punish with the hand. No weapon was for Zedekiah but his tongue. Neither could this rude presumption have been well taken if malice had not made magistracy insensible of this usurpation. Ahab was well content to see that hated mouth beaten by any hand. It is no new condition of God's faithful messengers to smart for saying truth. Falsehood doth not more bewray itself in any thing than in blows. Truth suffers while error persecutes. None are more ready to boast of the Spirit of God than those that have the least; as in vessels, the full are silent.

Innocent Micaiah neither defends nor complains. It would have well beseemed the religious king of Judah to have spoken in the cause of the dumb; to have checked insolent Zedekiah: he is content to give way to this tide of peremptory and general opposition.

The helpless prophet stands alone, yet lays about him with his tongue; *Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber and hide thyself.* Now, the proud Baalite showed himself too much; ere long he shall be glad to lurk unseen; his horns of iron cannot bear off his danger. The son of Ahab cannot choose but, in the zeal of revenging his father's deadly seducement, call for that false head of Zedekiah: in vain shall that impostor seek to hide himself from justice; but in the mean while he goes away with honour, Micaiah with censure; *Take Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.* An hard doom of truth! The gaol for his lodging, coarse bread and water for his food, shall but reserve Micaiah for a further revenge. The return of Ahab shall be the bane of the prophet.

Was not this he that advised Benhadad not to boast in the putting on his armour as in the ungirding it? and doth he now promise himself peace and victory before he buckle it on? No warning will dissuade the wilful.

So assured doth Ahab make himself of success, that he threats, ere he go, what he will do when he returns in peace. How justly doth God deride the misreckonings of proud and foolish

men! If Ahab had no other sins, his very confidence shall defeat him.

Yet the prophet cannot be overcome in his resolution: he knows his grounds cannot deceive him, and dare therefore cast the credit of his function upon this issue; *If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.* Let him never be called a prophet that dare not trust his God. This was no adventure, therefore, of reputation or life. Since he knew whom he believed, the event was no less sure than if it had been past. He is no God that is not constant to himself. Hath he spoken, and shall he not perform? What hold have we for our souls but his eternal word? The being of God is not more sure than his promises, than his sentences of judgment. Well may we appeal the testimony of the world in both; if there be not plagues for the wicked, if there be not rewards for the righteous, God hath not spoken by us.

Not Ahab only, but good Jehoshaphat is carried with the multitude. Their forces are joined against Ramoth.

The king of Israel doth not so trust his prophets that he dares trust himself in his own clothes. Thus shall he elude Micaiah's threat. I wis, the judgment of God, the Syrian shafts, cannot find him out in this unsuspected disguise! How fondly do vain men imagine to shift off the just revenges of the Almighty!

The king of Syria gives charge to his captains to fight against none but the king of Israel. Thus doth the unthankful infidel repay the mercy of his late victor. Ill was the snake saved that requites the favour of his life with a sting. Thus still the greatest are the fairest mark to envious eyes. By how much more eminent any man is in the Israel of God, so many more and more dangerous enemies must he expect. Both earth and hell conspire in their opposition to the worthiest. Those who are advanced above others have so much more need of the guard both of their own vigilancy and others' prayers.

Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his love. He is pursued for him in whose amity he offended. His cries deliver him; his cries, not to his pursuers, but to his God, whose mercy takes not advantage of our infirmity, but rescues us from those evils which we wilfully provoke. It is Ahab against whom not the Syrians only but God himself intends this quarrel. The enemy is taken off from Jehoshaphat.

O the just and mighty hand of that Divine Providence which

directeth all our actions to his own ends; which takes order where every shaft shall light, and guides the arrow of the strong archer into the joints of Ahab's harness! It was shot at a venture, falls by a destiny, and there falls where it may carry death to an hidden debtor. In all actions, both voluntary and casual, thy will, O God, shall be done by us, with whatever intentions. Little did the Syrian know whom he had stricken, no more than the arrow wherewith he struck. An invisible hand disposed of both, to the punishment of Ahab, to the vindication of Micaiah. How worthily, O God, art thou to be adored in thy justice and wisdom, to be feared in thy judgments!

Too late doth Ahab now think of the fair warnings of Micaiah, which he unwisely contemned; of the painful flatteries of Zedekiah, which he stubbornly believed. That guilty blood of his runs down out of his wound into the midst of his chariot, and pays Naboth his arrearages. O Ahab, what art thou the better for thine ivory house while thou hast a black soul? what comfort hast thou now in those flattering prophets, which tickled thine ears and secured thee of victories? what joy is it to thee now that thou wast great? Who had not rather be Micaiah in the gaol than Ahab in the chariot? Wicked men have the advantage of the way, godly men of the end.

The chariot is washed in the pool of Samaria: the dogs come to claim their due; they lick up the blood of the king of Israel. The tongues of those brute creatures shall make good the tongue of God's prophet. Micaiah is justified, Naboth is revenged, the Baalites confounded, Ahab judged: *Righteous art thou, O God, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works.*

AHAZIAH SICK, AND ELIJAH REVENGED.—2 Kings i.

Ahaziah succeeds his father Ahab both in his throne and in his sin. Who could look for better issue of those loins, of those examples?

God follows him with a double judgment; of the revolt of Moab, and of his own sickness. All the reign of Ahab had Moab been a quiet tributary, and furnished Israel with rich flocks and fleeces; now their subjection dies with that warlike king, and will not be inherited. This rebellion took advantage, as from the weaker spirits, so from the sickly body of Ahaziah, whose disease was not natural, but casual. Walking in his palace of Samaria, some grate

in the floor of his chamber breaks under him, and gives way to that fall whereby he is bruised and languisheth. The same hand that guided Ahab's shaft cracks Ahaziah's lattice. How infinite variety of plagues hath the just God for obstinate sinners! whether in the field or in the chamber, he knows to find them out. How fearlessly did Ahaziah walk on his wonted pavement! The Lord hath laid a trap for him, whereinto, while he thinks least, he falls irrecoverably. No place is safe for the man that is at variance with God.

The body of Ahaziah was not more sick than his soul was graceless. None but chance was his enemy, none but the god of Ekron must be his friend. He looks not up to the omnipotent hand of Divine Justice for the disease, or of mercy for the remedy; an idol is his refuge, whether for cure or intelligence.

We hear not till now of Baal-zebub. This new god of flies is perhaps of his making who now is a suitor to his own erection. All these heathen deities were but a devil with change of appellations; the influence of that evil spirit deluded those miserable clients, else there was no fly so impotent as that outside of the god of Ekron. Who would think that any Israelite could so far dote upon a stock, a fiend?

Time gathered much credit to this idol, insomuch as the Jews afterwards styled Beel-zebub the prince of all the regions of darkness. Ahaziah is the first that brings his oracle in request, and pays him the tribute of his devotion. He sends messengers, and says, *Go, inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease.*

The message was either idle or wicked; idle, if he sent it to a stock; if to a devil, both idle and wicked. What can the most intelligent spirits know of future things but what they see either in their causes or in the light of participation? What a madness was it in Ahaziah to seek to the postern while the foregate stood open! Could those evil spirits truly foretell events no way preexistent, yet they might not without sin be consulted. The evil of their nature debars all the benefits of their information. If not as intelligencers, much less may they be sought to as gods. Who cannot blush to hear and see that even the very evangelical Israel should yield pilgrims to the shrines of darkness? How many, after this clear light of the Gospel, in their losses, in their sicknesses, send to these infernal oracles, and damn themselves wilfully in a vain curiosity!

The message of the jealous God intercepts them with a just disdain, as here by Elijah: *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?* What can be a greater disparagement to the true God than to be neglected, than to stand aside, and see us make love to an hellish rival? Were there no God in Israel, in heaven, what could we do other, what worse?

This affront, of whatever, Ahaziah cannot escape without a revenge; *Therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.* It is an high indignity to the true God not to be sought to in our necessities; but so to be cashiered from our devotions as to have a false god thrust in his room is such a scorn, as it is well if it can escape with one death.

Let now the famous god of Ekron take off that brand of feared mortality which the living God hath set upon Ahaziah. Let Baal-zebub make good some better news to his distressed suppliant. Rather the king of Israel is himself, without his repentance, hasting to Beel-zebub.

This errand is soon done. The messengers are returned ere they go. Not a little were they amazed to hear their secret message from another's mouth, neither could choose but think, "He that can tell what Ahaziah said, what he thought, can foretell how he shall speed; we have met with a greater god than we went to seek, what need we inquire for another answer?" With this conceit, with this report, they return to their sick lord, and astonish him with so short, so sad a relation.

No marvel if the king inquired curiously of the habit and fashion of the man that could know this, that durst say this. They describe him a man whether of a hairy skin, or of rough, coarse, careless attire; thus drest, thus girded. Ahaziah readily apprehends it to be Elijah, the old friend of his father Ahab, of his mother Jezebel. More than once had he seen him, an unwelcome guest, in the court of Israel. The times had been such that the prophet could not at once speak true and please. Nothing but reproofs and menaces sounded from the mouth of Elijah. Micaiah and he were still as welcome to the eyes of that guilty prince as the Syrian arrow was into his flesh. Too well therefore had Ahaziah noted that querulous seer, and now is not a little troubled to see himself in succession haunted with that bold and ill-boding spirit.

Behold the true son of Jezebel; the anguish of his disease, the expectation of death, cannot take off the edge of his persecution of Elijah. It is against his will that his deathbed is not bloody. Had Ahaziah meant any other than a cruel violence to Elijah, he had sent a peaceable messenger to call him to the court, he had not sent a captain with a band of soldiers to fetch him. The instruments which he useth carry revenge in their face.

If he had not thought Elijah more than a man, what needed a band of fifty to apprehend one? and if he did think him such, why would he send to apprehend him by fifty? Surely, Ahaziah knew of old how miraculous a prophet Elijah was; what power that man had over all their base deities; what command of the elements, of the heavens; and yet he sends to attach him. It is a strange thing to see how wilfully godless men strive against the stream of their own hearts, hating that which they know good, fighting against that which they know divine.

What a gross disagreement is in the message of this Israelitish captain! *Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.* If he were a man of God, how hath he offended? and if he have justly offended the anointed of God, how is he a man of God? and if he be a man of God, and have not offended, why should he come down to punishment? Here is a kind confession with a false heart, with bloody hands. The world is full of those windy courtesies, real cruelties; deadly malice lurks under fair compliments, and while it flatters killeth.

The prophet hides not himself from the pursuit of Ahaziah; rather he sits where he may be most conspicuous, on the top of an hill. This band knows well where to find him, and climbs up in the sight of Elijah for his arrest. The steepness of the ascent, when they drew near to the highest reach, yielded a convenience both of respiration and parle; thence doth the captain imperiously call down the prophet.

Who would not tremble at the dreadful answer of Elijah? *If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.* What shall we say? That a prophet is revengeful? that soldiers suffer while a prophet strikes? that a prince's command is answered with imprecation, words with fire? that an unarmed seer should kill one and fifty at a blow? There are few tracks of Elijah that are ordinary and fit for common feet. His actions are more for wonder than for precedent. Not in his own defence would the prophet have been the death of so many,

if God had not by a peculiar instinct made him an instrument of this just vengeance. The divine justice finds it meet to do this for the terror of Israel, that he might teach them what it was to contemn, to persecute a prophet; that they might learn to fear Him whom they had forsaken, and confess that heaven was sensible of their insolencies and impieties.

If not as visibly, yet as certainly, doth God punish the violations of his ordinances, the affronts offered to his messengers, still and ever. Not ever with the same speed; sometimes the punishment overtakes the act, sometimes dogs it afar off, and seizeth upon the offender when his crime is forgotten: here, no sooner is the word out of Elijah's mouth than the fire is out of heaven.

O the wonderful power of a prophet! There sits Elijah in his coarse mantle on the top of the hill, and commands the heavens, and they obey him; *Let fire fall down from heaven.* He needs no more but say what he would have done: the fire falls down, as before upon the sacrifice in Carmel, so now upon the soldiers of Ahaziah.

What is man in the hands of his Maker? One flash of lightning hath consumed this one and fifty. And if all the hosts of Israel, yea of the world, had been in their rooms, there had needed no other force. What madness is it for him whose breath is in his nostrils to contend with the Almighty!

The time was when two zealous disciples would fain have imitated this fiery revenge of Elijah, and were repelled with a check. The very place puts them in mind of the judgment: not far from Samaria was this done by Elijah, and wished to be done by his disciples. So churlish a rejection of a Saviour seemed no less heinous than the endeavour of apprehending a prophet: *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias did?* The world yielded but one Elias; that which was zeal in him might be fury in another: the least variation of circumstance may make an example dangerous: presently therefore do they hear, *Ye know not of what spirit ye are.* It is the calling that varies the spirit; Elijah was God's minister for the execution of so severe a judgment; they were but the servants of their own impotent anger. There was fire in their breasts which God never kindled; far was it from the Saviour of men to second their earthly fire with his heavenly. He came, indeed, to send fire upon earth, but to warm, not to burn; and

if to burn, not the persons of men, but their corruptions. How much more safe is it for us to follow the meek Prophet of the New Testament, than that fervent prophet of the Old! Let the matter of our prayers be the sweet dews of mercy, not the fires of vengeance.

Would not any man have thought Ahaziah sufficiently warned by so terrible a judgment? Could he choose but say, "It is no meddling with a man that can speak lightning and death; what he hath said concerning me is too well approved by what he hath done to my messengers: God's hand is with him, mine shall not be against him." Yet now behold the rage of Ahaziah is so much the more kindled by this fire from heaven; and a more resolute captain, with a second band, is sent to fetch Elijah to death.

This man is in haste, and commands not only his descent, but his speed; *Come down quickly.* The charge implies a threat! Elijah must look for force, if he yield not. There needs no other weapon for defence, for offence, than the same tongue, the same breath. God hath fire enough for all the troops of Ahaziah. Immediately doth a sudden flame break out of heaven and consume this forward leader and his bold followers. It is a just presage and desert of ruin not to be warned; worthily are they made examples that will not take them.

What marble or flint is harder than a wicked heart? As if Ahaziah would despitefully spit in the face of heaven, and wrestle a fall with the Almighty, he will needs yet again set a third captain upon so desperate an employment.

How hot a service must this commander needs think himself put upon! Who can but pity his straits? There is death before him, death behind him; if he go not, the king's wrath is the messenger of death; if he go, the prophet's tongue is the executioner of death. Many an hard task will follow the service of a prince wedded to his passion, divorced from God.

Unwillingly, doubtless, and fearfully, doth this captain climb up the hill to scale that impregnable fort; but now, when he comes near to the assault, the battery that he lays to it is his prayers; his surest fight is upon his knees: *He went up, and came, and fell upon his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.* He confesses the judgment that befell his predecessors. The monuments of their

destruction were in his eye, and the terror of it in his heart; of an enemy therefore he is become a suppliant, and sues, not so much for the prophet's yieldance, as for his own life.

This was the way to offer violence to the prophet of God, to the God of that prophet, even humble supplications. We must deprecate that evil which we would avoid. If we would force blessings, we must entreat them. There is nothing to be gotten from God by strong hand, any thing by suit. The life of the captain is preserved; Elijah is by the angel commanded to go down with him speedily, fearlessly.

The prophet casts not with himself; "What safety can there be in this journey? I shall put myself into the hands of rude soldiers, and by them into the hands of an enraged king. If he did not eagerly thirst after my blood, he had never sought it with so much loss." But so soon as he had a charge from the angel he walks down resolutely, and as it were dares the dangers of so great an hostility. He knew that the same God who had fought for him upon the hill would not leave him in the valley; he knew that the angel which bade him go was guard enough against a world of enemies. Faith knows not how to fear, and can as easily contemn the suggestion of perils as infidelity can raise them.

The prophet looks boldly upon the court, which doubtless was not a little disaffected to him, and comes confidently into the bedchamber of Ahaziah; and sticks not to speak over the same words to his head which he had sent him not long since by his first messengers. Not one syllable will the prophet abate of his errand. It is not for an herald of heaven to be out of countenance, or to mince aught of the most killing messages of his God.

Whether the unexpected confidence both of the man and of the speech amazed the sick king of Israel; or whether the fear of some present judgment, wherewith he might suspect Elijah to come armed upon any act of violence that should be offered, overawed him; or whether now, at last, upon the sight and hearing of this man of God, the king's heart began to relent, and check itself for that sin for which he was justly reproved, I know not; but sure I am the prophet goes away untouched. Neither the furious purposes of Ahaziah nor the exasperations of a Jezebel can hurt that prophet whom God hath intended to a fiery chariot.

The hearts of kings are not their own. Subjects are not so much in their hands as they are in their Maker's. How easily can God tame the fierceness of any creature, and in the midst of

their most heady career stop them on the sudden, and fetch them upon the knees of their humble submission! It is good trusting God with the events of his own commands, who can at pleasure either avert evils or improve them to good.

According to the word of the prophet, Ahaziah dies. Not two whole years doth he sit in the throne of Israel, which he now must yield, in the want of children, to his brother. Wickedness shortens his reign. He had too much of Ahab and Jezebel to expect the blessing either of length or prosperity of government. As always in the other, so ofttimes in this world, doth God testify his anger to wicked men. Some live long, that they may aggravate their judgment, others die soon, that they may hasten it.

THE RAPTURE OF ELIJAH —2 Kings ii.

Long and happily hath Elijah fought the wars of his God; and now, after his noble and glorious victories, God will send him a chariot of triumph.

Not suddenly would God snatch away his prophet, without warning, without expectation; but acquaints him beforehand with the determination of his glory.

How full of heavenly joy was the soul of Elijah while he foreknew and looked for this instant happiness! with what contempt did he cast his eyes upon that earth which he was now presently to leave! with what ravishment of an inward pleasure did he look upon that heaven which he was to enjoy!

For a meet farewell to the earth, Elijah will go visit the schools of the prophets before his departure. These were in his way; of any part of the earth they were nearest unto heaven. In an holy progress, therefore, he walks his last round from Gilgal, near Jordan, to Bethel; from Bethel to Jericho; from Jericho to Jordan again.

In all these sacred colleges of divines he meant to leave the legacy of his love, counsel, confirmation, blessing. How happy a thing it is, while we are upon earth, to improve our time and gifts to the best behoof of God's Church; and after the assurance of our own blessedness, to help others to the same heaven!

But, O God, who can but wonder at the course of thy wise and powerful administrations? Even in the midst of the degeneration and idolatries of Israel hast thou reserved to thyself whole so-

cieties of holy prophets, and out of those sinful and revolted tribes hast raised the two great miracles of prophets, Elijah and Elisha, in an immediate succession. Judah itself, under a religious Jehoshaphat, yielded not so eminent and clearly illuminated spirits. The mercy of our provident God will neither be confined nor excluded; neither confined to the places of public profession, nor excluded from the depraved congregations of his own people. Where he hath loved, he cannot easily be estranged; rather, where sin abounds, his grace aboundeth much more, and raiseth so much stronger helps as he sees the dangers greater.

Happy was Elisha in the attendance of so gracious a master, and the more happy that he knows it. Fain would Elijah shake him off at Gilgal; if not there, at Bethel; if not yet there, at Jericho. A private message, on which Elijah must go alone, is pretended from the Lord. Whether shall we say the prophet did this, for the trial of the constant affection of his careful and diligent servant, or, that it was concealed from Elijah that his departure was revealed to Elisha? Perhaps he that knew of his own reception into heaven did not know what witnesses would be allowed to that miraculous act; and now his humble modesty affected a silent and unnoted passage.

Even Elisha knew something that was hid from his master now upon the threshold of heaven. No mere creature was ever made of the whole counsel of the Highest. Some things have been disclosed to babes and novices that have been closed up to the most wise and judicious. In natural speculations, the greater wit and deeper judgment still carry it; but in the revelations of God, the favour of his choice sways all, not the power of our apprehension.

The master may both command and entreat his servant's stay in vain. Elisha must be pardoned this holy and zealous disobedience; *As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* His master may be withdrawn from him, he will not be withdrawn from his master. He knew that the blessing was at the parting; and if he had diligently attended all his life, and now slacked in the last act, he had lost the reward of his service. The evening praises the day, and the chief grace of the theatre is in the last scene: *Be faithful to the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

That Elijah should be translated, and what day he should be translated, God would have no secret. The sons of the prophets at Bethel, at Jericho, both know it, and ask Elisha if he knew it

not; *Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head this day?* and he answered, *Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.*

How familiarly do these prophets interknow one another! how kindly do they communicate their visions! Seldom ever was any knowledge given to keep, but to impart; the grace of this rich jewel is lost in concealment.

The removal of an Elijah is so important a business that it is not fit to be done without noise. Many shall have their share in his loss: he must be missed on the sudden: it was meet therefore that the world should know his rapture should be divine and glorious.

I do not find where the day of any natural death is notified to so many. By how much more wonder there was in this assumption, by so much more shall it be forerevealed. It is enough for ordinary occurrents to be known by their event; supernatural things have need of premonition, that men's hearts may be both prepared for their receipt and confirmed in their certainty.

Thrice was Elisha entreated, thrice hath he denied to stay behind his now departing master; on whom both his eyes and his thoughts are so fixed that he cannot give allowance so much as to the interpellation of a question of his fellow prophets.

Together, therefore, are this wonderful pair come to the last stage of their separation, the banks of Jordan.

Those that were not admitted to be attendants of their journey yet will not be debarred from being spectators of so marvellous an issue. *Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off.* I marvel there were no more. How could any son of the prophets stay within the college walls that day, when he knew what was meant to Elijah? Perhaps, though they knew that to be the prophet's last day, yet they might think his disparition should be sudden and insensible; besides, they found how much he affected secrecy in this intended departure: yet the fifty prophets of Jericho will make proof of their eyes; and with much intention assay who shall have the last sight of Elijah.

Miracles are not purposed to silence and obscurity. God will not work wonders without witnesses. Since he doth them on purpose to win glory to his name, his end were frustrate without their notice. Even so, O Saviour, when thou hadst raised thyself from the dead, thou wouldest be seen of more than five hundred brethren at once; and when thou wouldest raise up thy glorified

body from earth into heaven, thou didst not ascend from some close valley, but from the mount of Olives; not in the night, not alone, but in the clear day, in the view of many eyes; which were so fixed upon that point of thine heaven, that they could scarce be removed by the check of angels.

Jordan must be crossed by Elijah in his way to heaven. There must be a meet parallel betwixt the two great prophets that shall meet Christ upon Tabor, Moses and Elias. Both received visions on Horeb: to both God appeared there in fire and other forms of terror: both were sent to kings; one to Pharaoh, the other to Ahab: both prepared miraculous tables; the one of quails and manna in the desert, the other of meal and oil in Sarepta: both opened heaven; the one for that nourishing dew, the other for those refreshing showers: both revenged idolatries with the sword; the one upon the worshippers of the golden calf, the other upon the four hundred Baalites: both quenched the drought of Israel; the one out of the rock, the other out of the cloud: both divided the waters; the one of the Red sea, the other of Jordan: both of them are forewarned of their departure: both must be fetched away beyond Jordan; the body of Elijah is translated, the body of Moses is hid: what Moses doth by his rod Elijah doth by his mantle; with that he smites the waters, and they, as fearing the divine power which wrought with the prophet, run away from him and stand on heaps, leaving their dry channel for the passage of those awful feet. It is not long since he mulcted them with a general exsiccation; now he only bids them stand aside, and give way to his last walk, that he might with dry feet mount up into the celestial chariot.

The waters do not now first obey him. They know that mantle of old; which hath oft given laws to their falling, rising, standing. They are passed over; and now, when Elijah finds himself treading on his last earth, he proffers a munificent boon to his faithful servant; *Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee.*

I do not hear him say, "Ask of me when I am gone; in my glorified condition I shall be more able to bestead thee;" but, "Ask before I go." We have a communion with the saints departed, not a commerce. When they are enabled to do more for us, they are less apt to be solicited by us. It is safe suing where we are sure that we are heard.

Had not Elijah received a peculiar instinct for this proffer, he

had not been thus liberal. It were presumption to be bountiful on another's cost, without leave of the owner. The mercy of our good God allows his favourites not only to receive, but to give; not only to receive for themselves, but to convey blessings to others. What can that man want that is befriended of the faithful?

Elisha needs not go far to seek for a suit. It was in his heart, in his mouth; *Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* Every prophet must be a son to Elijah, but Elisha would be his heir, and craves the happy right of his primogeniture, the double share to his brethren. It was not wealth, nor safety, nor ease, nor honour that Elisha cares for. The world lies open before him; he may take his choice; the rest he contemneth; nothing will serve him but a large measure of his master's spirit.

No carnal thought was guilty of this sacred ambition. Affectation of eminence was too base a conceit to fall into that man of God. He saw that the times needed strong convictions; he saw that he could not otherwise wield the succession to such a master; therefore he sues for a double portion of spirit; the spirit of prophecy to foreknow, the spirit of power to work. We cannot be too covetous, too ambitious of spiritual gifts; such especially as may enable us to win most advantage to God in our vocations. Our wishes are the true touchstone of our estate. Such as we wish to be, we are. Worldly hearts affect earthly things; spiritual, divine. We cannot better know what we are indeed than by what we would be.

Elijah acknowledges the difficulty, and promises the grant of so great a request, suspended yet upon the condition of Elisha's eyesight; *If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be.* What are the eyes to the furniture of the soul? what power is there in those visive beams to draw down a double portion of Elijah's spirit? God doth not always look at efficacy and merit in the conditions of our actions, but at the freedom of his own appointments. The eye was only to be employed as the servant of the heart, that the desires might be so much more intended with the sight. Vehemence is the way to speed both in earth and in heaven. If but the eyelids of Elisha fall, if his thoughts slacken, his hopes are dashed. There must be fixedness and vigilance in those that desire double graces.

Elijah was going on and talking when the chariot of heaven came to fetch him. Surely, had not that conference been needful

and divine, it had given way to meditation; and Elijah had been taken up rather from his knees than from his feet. There can be no better posture or state for the messenger of our dissolution to find us in, than in a diligent prosecution of our calling. The busy attendance of our holy vocation is no less pleasing to God than an immediate devotion: *Happy is the servant whom the Master, when he comes, shall find so doing.*

O the singular glory of Elijah! What mortal creature ever had this honour to be visibly fetched by the angels of God to his heaven? Every soul of the elect is attended and carried to blessedness by those invisible messengers; but what flesh and blood was ever graced with such a convoy?

There are three bodily inhabitants of heaven, Enoch, Elijah, our Saviour Christ: the first, before the Law; the second, under the Law; the third, under the Gospel: all three in a several form of translation. Our blessed Saviour raised himself to and above the heavens by his own immediate power; he ascended as the Son, they as servants; he as God, they as creatures. Elijah ascended by the visible ministry of angels, Enoch insensibly. Wherefore, O God, hast thou done thus, but to give us a taste of what shall be? to let us see that heaven was never shut to the faithful? to give us assurance of the future glorification of this mortal and corruptible part? Even thus, O Saviour, when thou shalt descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, we that are alive and remain shall be caught up, together with the raised bodies of thy saints, into the clouds, to meet thee in the air, to dwell with thee in glory.

Many forms have those celestial spirits taken to themselves in their apparitions to men; but, of all other, most often hath the Almighty made his messengers *a flame of fire:* never more properly than here. How had the Spirit of God kindled the hot fires of zeal in the breast of Elijah! how had this prophet thrice commanded fire from heaven to earth! how fitly now, at last, do these seraphical fires carry him from earth to heaven!

What do we see in this rapture of Elijah but violence and terror, whirlwind and fire; two of those fearful representations which the prophet had in the rock of Horeb? Never any man entered into glory with ease. Even the most favourable change hath some equivalency to a natural dissolution: although doubtless to Elijah this fire had a lightsomeness and resplendence, not terror; this whirlwind had speed, not violence. Thus hast thou,

O Saviour, bidden us, when the elements shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be flaming about our ears, to lift up our heads with joy, because our redemption draweth nigh. Come death, come fire, come whirlwind; they are worthy to be welcome that shall carry us to immortality.

This arreption was sudden; yet Elisha sees both the chariot and the horses and the ascent; and cries to his now changed master, between heaven and earth, *My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.* Shaphat of Abelmeholah hath yielded this title to Elijah, the natural father of Elisha to the spiritual. Neither of them may be neglected; but after the yoke of oxen killed at the farewell we hear of no more greetings, no more bewailings of his bodily parent; and now that Elijah is taken from him he cries out like a distressed orphan, *My father, my father;* and when he hath lost the sight of him he rends his clothes in pieces, according to the fashion of the most passionate mourners.

That Elisha sees his master half way in heaven cannot take away the sorrow of his loss. The departure of a faithful prophet of God is worthy of our lamentation.

Neither is it private affection that must sway our grief, but respects to the public: Elisha says not only *My father*, but *the chariot and horsemen of Israel.* That we have foregone a father should not so much trouble us as that Israel hath lost his guard. Certainly the view of this heavenly chariot and horses that came for Elijah puts Elisha in mind of that chariot and horsemen which Elijah was to Israel. These were God's chariots; Elijah was theirs. God's chariot and theirs are upon the same wheels mounted into heaven. No forces are so strong as the spiritual. The prayers of an Elijah are more powerful than all the armies of flesh. The first thing that this seer discerns after the separation of his master is the nakedness of Israel in his loss. If we muster soldiers and lose zealous prophets, it is but a woful exchange.

Elijah's mantle falls from him in the rising. There was no use of that whither he was going, there was whence he was taken. Elisha justly takes up this dear monument of his glorified master; a good supply for his rent garments: this was it which, in presage of his future right, Elijah invested him withal upon the first sight, when he was ploughing with the twelve yoke of oxen; now it falls from heaven to his possession. I do not see him adore so precious a relic; I see him take it up, cast it about him.

Pensive and masterless doth he now come back to the banks

of Jordan, whose stream he must pass in his return to the schools of the prophets. Erewhile he saw what way that river gave to the mantle of Elijah. He knew that power was not in the cloth, but in the spirit of him that wore it. To try therefore whether he were no less the heir of that spirit than of that garment, *he took the mantle of Elijah, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* Elisha doth not expostulate and challenge, but pray. And if he had said, "Lord God, it was thy promise to me by my departed master, that if I should see him in his last passage a double portion of his spirit should be upon me. I followed him with my eyes in that fire and whirlwind; now therefore, O God, make good thy gracious word to thy servant; show some token upon me for good; make this the first proof of the miraculous power wherewith thou shalt endue me; let Jordan give the same way to me as it did to my master." Immediately the stream, as acknowledging the same mantle, though in another hand, divides itself, and yields passage to the successor of Elijah.

The fifty sons of the prophets having been afar off witnesses of these admirable events, do well see that Elijah, though translated in body, hath yet left his spirit behind him. They meet Elisha, and bow themselves to the ground before him. It was not the outside of Elijah which they had wont to stoop unto with so much veneration, it was his spirit; which, since they now find in another subject, they entertain with equal reverence. No envy, no emulation raiseth up their stomachs against Elijah's servant, but where they see eminent graces they are willingly prostrate. Those that are truly gracious do no less rejoice in the riches of others' gifts than humbly undervalue their own. These men were trained up in the schools of the prophets, Elisha at the plough and cart; yet now they stand not upon terms of their worth and his meanness, but meekly fall down before him whom God will honour. It is not to be regarded who the man is, but whom God would make him. The more unlikely the means is, the more is the glory of the workman. It is the praise of an holy ingenuity to magnify the graces of God wherever it finds them.

These young prophets are no less full of zeal than reverence; zeal to Elijah, reverence to Elisha. They see Elijah carried up in the air; they knew this was not the first time of his supernatural removal; imagining it therefore possible that the Spirit of God had cast him upon some remote mountain or valley, they proffer the labour of their servants to seek him. In some things

even professed seers are blind: could they think God would send such a chariot and horses for a less voyage than heaven?

Elisha, knowing his master beyond all the sphere of mortality, forbids them. Good-will makes them unmannerly: their importunity urges him till he is ashamed; not his approbation, but their vehemence carries at last a condescent: else he might perhaps have seemed enviously unwilling to fetch back so admired a master, and loath to forego that mantle. Some things may be yielded, for the redeeming of our own vexation and avoidance of others' misconstruction, which out of true judgment we see no cause to affect.

The messengers, tired with three days' search, turn back as wise as they went. Some men are best satisfied when they have wearied themselves in their own ways; nothing will teach them wit but disappointments. Their painful error leads them to a right conceit of Elijah's happier transportation.

Those that would find Elijah, let them aspire to the heavenly paradise. Let them follow the high steps of his sincere faithfulness, strong patience, undaunted courage, fervent zeal. Shortly, let them walk in the ways of his holy and constant obedience: at last God shall send the fiery chariot of death to fetch them up to that heaven of heavens, where they shall triumph in everlasting joys.

ELISHA HEALING THE WATERS; CURSING THE CHILDREN; RELIEVING THE KINGS.

2 Kings ii, iii.

It is good making use of a prophet while we have him. Elisha stayed some while at Jericho: the citizens resort to him with a common suit: their structure was not more pleasant than their waters unwholesome; and their soil by those corrupt waters: they sue to Elisha for the remedy.

Why had they not all this while made their moan to Elijah? Was it that they were more awed with his greater austerity? or was it that they met not with so fit an opportunity of his commoration amongst them? It was told them what power Elisha had exercised upon the waters of Jordan, and now they ply him for theirs. Examples of beneficence easily move us to a request and expectation of favours.

What ailed the waters of Jericho? surely originally they were not ill affected. No men could be so foolish as to build a city where neither earth nor water were useful. Mere prospect could not carry men to the neglect of health and profit. Hiel the Bethelite would never have reedified it with danger of a curse, so lately as in the days of Ahab, if it had been of old notorious for so foul an annoyance. Not therefore the ancient malediction of Joshua, not the neighbourhood of that noisome lake of Sodom, was guilty of this disease of the soil and waters, but the late sins of the inhabitants: *He turneth the rivers into a wilderness, and watersprings into a dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.* How oft have we seen the same field both full and famishing! how oft the same waters both safe, and, by some irruption or new tincture, hurtful! Howsoever natural causes may concur, heaven, and earth, and air, and waters follow the temper of our souls, of our lives; and are therefore indisposed because we are so.

Jericho began now to make itself capable of a better state, since it was now become a receptacle of prophets. Elisha is willing to gratify his hosts. It is reason that any place should fare the better for the presence of divines.

The medicine is more strange than the disease; *Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein.* Why a cruse? why new? why salt in that new cruse? How should salt make water potable? or, if there were any such virtue in it, what could a cruseful do to a whole current? or, if that measure were sufficient, what was the age of the cruse to the force of the salt? Yet Elisha calls for salt in a new cruse. God, who wrought this by his prophet, is a free agent. As he will not bind his power to means, so will he by his power bind unlikely means to perform his will. Natural properties have no place in miraculous works. No less easy is it for God to work by contrary than subordinate powers.

The prophet doth not cast the salt into the channel, but into the spring of the waters. If the fountain be redressed, the streams cannot be faulty; as contrarily, the purity and soundness of the stream avail nothing to the redress of the fountain. Reformation must begin at the well-head of the abuse. The order of being is a good guide to the method of amending, Virtue doth not run backward. Had Elisha cast the salt into the brooks and ditches, the remedy must have striven against the stream to reach up to the spring; now it is but one labour to cure the fountain.

Our heart is a well of bitter and venomous water, our actions are the streams; in vain shall we cleanse our hands while our hearts are evil.

The cruse and the salt must be their own; the act must be his; the power, God's: he cast the salt into the spring, and said; *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barrenness.* Far was it from Elisha to challenge aught to himself. Before, when he should divide the waters of Jordan, he did not say, "Where is the power of Elisha?" but, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* And now, when he should cure the waters of Jericho, he says not, "Thus saith Elisha," but, *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters.* How careful is the man of God that no part of God's glory should stick to his own fingers! Jericho shall know to whom they owe the blessing, that they may duly return the thanks. Elisha professes he can do no more of himself than that salt, than that cruse; only God shall work by him, by it; and whatever that Almighty hand undertakes cannot fail, yea is already done. Neither doth he say, "I will heal," but, *I have healed.* Even so, O God, if thou cast into the fountain of our hearts but one cruse-ful of the salt of thy Spirit, we are whole; no thought can pass between the receipt and the remedy.

As the general visitor of the schools of the prophets, Elisha passeth from Jericho to that other college at Bethel. Bethel was a place of strange composition: there were at once the golden calf of Jeroboam and the school of God: true religion and idolatry found a free harbour within those walls. I do not marvel that God's prophets would plant there: there was the most need of their presence where they found the spring-head of corruption: physicians are of most use where diseases do abound.

As he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, thou bald head; Go up, thou bald head. Even the very boys of Bethel have learned to scoff at a prophet: the spite of their idolatrous parents is easily propagated. Children are such as their institution. Infancy is led altogether by imitation; it hath neither words nor actions but infused by others: if it have good or ill language, it is but borrowed; and the shame or thank is due to those that lent it them.

What was it that these ill-taught children upbraided to the prophet but a slight natural defect, not worthy the name of a

blemish, the want of a little hair? at the best, a comely excrement, no part of the body. Had there been deformity in that smoothness of the head which some great wits have honoured with praises, a faultless and remediless eyesore had been no fit matter for a taunt.

How small occasions will be taken to disgrace a prophet! If they could have said aught worse, Elisha had not heard of this. God had crowned that head with honour which the Bethelitish children loaded with scorn.

Who would have thought the rude terms of waggish boys worthy of any thing but neglect? Elisha looks at them with severe brows, and, like the heir of him that called down fire upon the two captains and their fifties, curses them in the name of the Lord. Two she-bears out of the wood hasten to be his executioners, and tear two-and-forty of them in pieces. O fearful example of divine justice! This was not the revenge of an angry prophet; it was the punishment of a righteous judge. God and his seer looked through these children at the parents, at all Israel. He would punish the parents' misnurturing their children to the contemptuous usage of a prophet with the death of those children which they had mistaught; he would teach Israel what it was to misuse a prophet; and if he would not endure these contumelies unrevenged in the mouths of children, what vengeance was enough for aged persecutors?

Doubtless, some of the children escaped to tell the news of their fellows. What lamentation do we think there was in the streets of Bethel? how did the distressed mothers wring their hands for this woful orbation! And now, when they came forth to fetch the remnants of their own flesh, what a sad spectacle it was, to find the fields strewed with those mangled carcasses! It is an unprofitable sorrow that follows a judgment. Had these parents been as careful to train up their children in good discipline, and to correct their disorders, as they are now passionate in bemoaning their loss, this slaughter had never been. In vain do we look for good of those children whose education we have neglected; in vain do we grieve for those miscarriages which our care might have prevented.

Elisha knew the success, yet doth he not balk the city of Bethel. Do we not wonder that the furious impatience of those parents whom the curse of Elisha robbed of their children did not break forth to some malicious practice against the prophet?

Would we not think the prophet might misdoubt some hard measure from those exasperated citizens? There lay his way. He follows God without fear of men; as well knowing, that either they durst not or they could not act violence. They knew there were bears in the wood and fires in heaven; and if their malice would have ventured above their courage, they could have no more power over Elisha in the streets, than those hungry beasts had in the way. Whither dare not a prophet go when God calls him?

Having visited the schools of the prophets, Elisha retires to mount Carmel; and, after some holy solitariness, returns to the city of Samaria. He can never be a profitable seer that is either always or never alone. Carmel shall fit him for Samaria; contemplation for action. That mother city of Israel must needs afford him most work.

Yet is the throne of Ahaziah succeeded by a brother less ill than himself; than the parents of both. Ahab's impiety hath not a perfect heir of Jehoram. That son of his hates his Baal, though he keeps his calves. Even into the most wicked families it pleaseth God to cast his most powerful restraints, that all are not equally vicious. It is no news to see lewd men make scruple of some sins. The world were not to live in if all sins were affected by all. It is no thank to Ahab and Jezebel that their son is no Baalite. As no good is traduced from parents, so not all evil. There is an Almighty hand that stops the foul current of nature at his pleasure. No idolater can say that his child shall not be a convert.

The affinity betwixt the houses of Israel and Judah holds good in succession. Jehoram inherits the friendship, the aid of Jehoshaphat; whose counsel, as is most likely, had cured him of that Baalism.

It was a good war whereto he solicits the good king of Judah. The king of Moab, who had been an ancient tributary from the days of David, falls now from his homage, and refuses to pay his hundred thousand lambs, an hundred thousand rams with fleeces, to the king of Israel. The backs of Israel can ill miss the wool of Moab: they will put on iron to recover their cloth.

Jehoshaphat had been once well chid, well frighted, for joining with Ahab against Aram; yet doth he not stick now again to come into the field with Jehoram against Moab. The cause is more favourable, less dangerous: Baal is cast down: the images

of the false gods are gone, though the false images of the true God stand still: beside, this rebellious Moab had joined with the Syrians formerly against Judah, so as Jehoshaphat is interested in the revenge.

After resolution of the end, wisely do these kings deliberate of the way. It is agreed to pass through Edom. That kingdom was annexed to the crown of Judah: well might Jehoshaphat make bold with his own. It was, it seems, a march far about in the measure of the way, but nearest to their purpose: the assault would be thus more easy if the passage were more tedious.

The three kings of Israel, Judah, Edom, together with their armies, are upon foot. They are no sooner come into the parching wilds of Edom than they are ready to die for thirst. If the channels were far off, yet the waters were farther: the scorching beams of the sun have dried them up, and have left those rivers more fit for walk than entertainment. What are the greatest monarchs of the world if they want but water to their mouths? What can their crowns and plumes and rich arms avail them when they are abridged but of that which is the drink of beasts?

With dry tongues and lips do they now confer of their common misery. Jehoram deplores the calamity into which they were fallen; but Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet. Every man can bewail a misery; every man cannot find the way out of it. Still yet I hear good Jehoshaphat speak too late. He should have inquired for a prophet ere he had gone forth; so had he avoided these straits. Not to consult at all with God is Jehoram's sin; to consult late, is Jehoshaphat's: the former is atheous carelessness; the latter, forgetful oversight. The best man may slacken good duties, the worst contemns them.

Not without some specialty from God doth Elisha follow the camp, else that had been no element for a prophet. Little did the good king of Judah think that God was so near him. Purposely was this holy seer sent for the succour of Jehoshaphat and his faithful followers, when they were so far from dreaming of their delivery, that they knew not of a danger. It would be wide with the best men if the eye of Divine Providence were not open upon them, when the eye of their care is shut towards it.

How well did Elisha in the wars! The strongest squadron of Israel was within that breast. All their armour of proof had not so much safety and protection as his mantle.

Though the king of Israel would take no notice of the prophet, yet one of his courtiers did; *Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.* This follower of Jehoram knows Elisha by his own name, by his father's, by his master's. The court of Israel was profane and idolatrous enough, yet even there God's prophet had both knowledge and honour. His very service to Elijah was enough to win him reverence. It is better to be an attendant of some man than to be attended by many. That he had poured water on Elijah's hands was insinuation enough that he could pour out water for those three kings.

The three kings walk down, by the motion of Jehoshaphat, to the man of God. It was news to see three kings going down to the servant of him who ran before the chariot of Ahab. Religion and necessity have both of them much power of humiliation; I know not whether more. Either zeal or need will make a prophet honoured.

How sharply dares the man of God to chide his sovereign the king of Israel! The liberty of the prophets was no less singular than their calling. He that would borrow their tongue must show their commission. As God reproved kings for their sakes, so did not they stick to reprove kings for his sake. Thus much freedom they must leave to their successors, that we may not spare the vices of them whose persons we must spare.

Justly is Jehoram turned off to the prophets of his father and the prophets of his mother. It is but right and equal that those which we have made the comfort and stay of our peace should be the refuge of our extremity. If our prosperity have made the world our god, how worthily shall our deathbed be choked with this exprobration!

Neither would the case bear an apology, nor the time an expostulation. Jehoram cannot excuse; he can complain. He finds that now three kings, three kingdoms, are at the mercy of one prophet; it was time for him to speak fair: nothing sounds from him but lamentations and entreaties; *Nay, for the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.*

Jehoram hath so much grace as to confess the impotency of those he had trusted and the power of that God whom he had neglected; every sinner cannot see and acknowledge the hand of God in his sufferings. Already hath the distressed prince gained

something by his misery: none complains so much as he; none feels so much as he: all the rest suffer for him, and therefore he suffers in them all.

The man of God, who well sees the insufficiency of Jehoram's humiliation, lays on yet more load; *As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.*

Behold the double spirit of Elijah. The master was not more bold with the father than the servant was with the son: Elisha was a subject and a prophet: he must say that as a prophet which he might not as a subject; as a prophet he would not have looked at him, whom as a subject he would have bowed to. It is one thing when God speaks by him, another when he speaks of himself. That it might well appear his dislike of sin stood with his honour of sovereignty, Jehoshaphat goes away with that respect which Jehoram missed. No less doth God and his prophet regard religious sincerity than they abhor idolatry and profaneness.

What shall not be done for a Jehoshaphat? For his sake shall those two other princes and their vast armies live and prevail. Edom and Israel, whether single or conjoined, had perished by the drought of the desert, by the sword of Moab; one Jehoshaphat gives them both life and victory. It is in the power of one good man to oblige a world. We receive true though insensible favours from the presence of the righteous. Next to being good, it is happy to converse with them that are so: if we be not bettered by their example, we are blest by their protection.

Who wonders not to hear a prophet call for a minstrel in the midst of that mournful distress of Israel and Judah? who would not have expected his charge of tears and prayers rather than of music? How unseasonable are songs to an heavy heart! It was not for their ears, it was for his own bosom, that Elisha called for music; that his spirits, after their zealous agitation, might be sweetly composed, and put into a meet temper for receiving the calm visions of God. Perhaps it was some holy Levite that followed the camp of Jehoshaphat whose minstrelsy was required for so sacred a purpose. None but a quiet breast is capable of divine revelations. Nothing is more powerful to settle a troubled heart than a melodious harmony. The spirit of prophecy was not the more invited, the prophet's spirit was the better disposed, by pleasing sounds. The same God that will reveal his will to the

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prophet suggests this demand; *Bring me a minstrel.* How many say thus when they would put God from them! Profane mirth, wanton music, debauches the soul, and makes no less room for the unclean spirit than spiritual melody doth for the divine.

No prophet had ever the Spirit at command. The hand of the minstrel can do nothing without the hand of the Lord. While the music sounds in the ear, God speaks to the heart of Elisha; *Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches; ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be full of water,* &c.

To see wind and rain in the height of that drought would have seemed as wonderful as pleasing; but to see abundance of water without wind or rain was yet more miraculous. I know not how the sight of the means abates our admiration of the effect. Where no causes can be found out, we are forced to confess omnipotency. Elijah relieved Israel with water, but it was out of the clouds, and those clouds rose from the sea; but whence Elisha shall fetch it is not more marvellous than secret.

All that evening, all that night, must the faith of Israel and Judah be exercised with expectation. At the hour of the morning sacrifice, no sooner did the blood of that oblation gush forth, than the streams of waters gushed forth into their new channels, and filled the country with a refreshing moisture. Elijah fetched down his fire at the hour of the evening sacrifice, Elisha fetched up his water at the hour of the morning sacrifice. God gives respect to his own hours for the encouragement of our observation. If his wisdom hath set us any peculiar times, we cannot keep them without a blessing. The devotions of all true Jews, all the world over, were in that hour combined: how seasonably doth the wisdom of God pick out that instant, wherein he might at once answer both Elisha's prophecy and his people's prayers!

The prophet hath assured the kings, not of water only, but of victory. Moab hears of enemies, and is addressed to war. Their own error shall cut their throats; they rise soon enough to beguile themselves: the beams of the rising sun, glistering upon those vaporous and unexpected waters, carried, in the eyes of some Moabites, a semblance of blood. A few eyes were enough to fill all ears with a false noise: the deceived sense miscarries the imagination; *This is blood; the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.*

Civil broils give just advantage to a common enemy; therefore must the camps be spoiled, because the kings have smitten each other. Those that shall be deceived are given over to credulity. The Moabites do not examine either the conceit or the report, but fly in confusedly upon the camp of Israel, whom they find too late to have no enemies but themselves. As if death would not have hastened enough to them, they come to fetch it; they come to challenge it; it seizeth upon them unavoidably; they are smitten, their cities razed, their lands marred, their wells stopped, their trees felled; as if God meant to waste them but once.

No onsets are so furious as the last assaults of the desperate. The king of Moab, now hopeless of recovery, would be glad to shut up with a pleasing revenge. With seven hundred resolute followers he rushes into the battle towards the king of Edom, as if he would bid death welcome might he but carry with him that despited neighbour; and now, mad with the repulse, he returns; and, whether as angry with his destiny, or as barbarously affecting to win his cruel gods with so dear a sacrifice, he offers them with his own hand the blood of his eldest son in the sight of Israel, and sends him up in smoke to those hellish deities. O prodigious act, whether of rage or of devotion! What an hand hath Satan over his miserable vassals! What marvel is it to see men sacrifice their souls in an unfelt oblation to these plausible tempters, when their own flesh and blood hath not been spared? There is no tyrant to the prince of darkness.

ELISHA WITH THE SHUNAMITE.—2 Kings iv.

The holy prophets under the Old Testament did not abhor the marriage bed. They did not think themselves too pure for an institution of their Maker.

The distressed widow of one of the sons of the prophets comes to Elisha to bemoan her condition. Her husband is dead, and dead in debt. Death hath no sooner seized on him than her two sons, the remaining comfort of her life, are to be seized on by his creditors for bondmen. How thick did the miseries of this poor afflicted woman light upon her! Her husband is lost, her estate clogged with debts, her children ready to be taken for slaves! Her husband was a religious and worthy man. He paid his debts to nature, he could not to his creditors. They are cruel, and rake in the scarce closed wound of her sorrow, passing an arrest, worse

than death, upon her sons. Widowhood, poverty, servitude, have conspired to make her perfectly miserable.

Virtue and goodness can pay no debts. The holiest man may be deep in arrearages, and break the bank, not through lavishness and riot of expense, (religion teaches us to moderate our hands, to spend within the proportion of our estate,) but through either iniquity of times or evil casualties.

Ahab and Jezebel were lately in the throne. Who can marvel that a prophet was in debt? It was well that any good man might have his breath free, though his estate were not.

Wilfully to overlash our ability cannot stand with wisdom and good government, but no providence can guard us from crosses. Holiness is no more defence against debt than against death. Grace can keep us from unthriftiness, not from want.

Whither doth the prophet's widow come to bewail her case but to Elisha? Every one would not be sensible of her affliction; or if they would pity, yet could not relieve her: Elisha could do both. Into his ear doth she unload her griefs. It is no small point of wisdom to know where to plant our lamentation; otherwise, instead of comfort, we may meet with scorn and insultation.

None can so freely compassionate the hard terms of a prophet as an Elisha. He finds that she is not querulously impatient, expressing her sorrow without murmuring and discontentment, making a loving and honourable mention of that husband who had left her distressed: readily therefore doth he incline to her succour; *What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?*

Elisha, when he hears of her debt, asks of her substance. Had her house been furnished with any valuable commodity, the prophet implies the necessity of selling it for satisfaction. Our own abundance can ill stand with our engagement to others. It is great injustice for us to be full of others' purses. It is not our own which we owe to another. What is it other than a plausible stealth, to feed our riot with the want of the owner?

He that could multiply her substance could know it. God and his prophet loves to hear our necessities out of our own mouths; *Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.* It is neither news nor shame for a prophet to be poor.

Grief and want perhaps hastened his end; both of them are left for the dowry of his careful widow.

She had complained, if there had been any possibility of remedy

at home. Bashfulness had stopped her mouth thus long, and should have done yet longer, if the exigence of her children's servitude had not opened it. No want is so worthy of relief as that which is loathest to come forth. *Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.*

She that owed much and had nothing, yet must borrow more, that she may pay all. Poverty had not so discredited her with her neighbours that they should doubt to lend her those vessels empty which they had grudged full.

Her want was too well known; it could not but seem strange to the neighbours to see this poor widow so busily pestering her house with empty tubs, which they knew she had nothing to fill. They knew well enough she had neither field nor vineyard nor orchard, and therefore must needs marvel at such unprofitable diligence.

If their curiosity would be inquiring after her intentions, she is commanded secrecy. The doors must be shut upon herself and her sons while the oil is increasing; no eye shall see the miracle in working; enow shall see it, once wrought. This act was no less a proof of her faith than an improvement of her estate; it was an exercise of her devotion as well as of her diligence. It was fit her doors should be shut while her heart and lips were opened in an holy invocation.

Out of one small jar was poured out so much oil as by miraculous multiplication filled all that empty cask. Scarce had that pot any bottom; at least, the bottom that it had was to be measured by the brims of all those vessels; this was so deep as they were high; could they have held more this pot had not been empty. Even so the bounty of our God gives grace and glory according to the capacity of the receiver; when he ceaseth to infuse, it is for want of room in the heart that takes it in. Could we hold more, O God, thou wouldest give more; if there be any defect, it is in our vessels, not in thy beneficence.

How did the heart of this poor widow run over, as with wonder, so with joy and thankfulness, to see such a river of oil rise out of so small a spring! to see all her vessels swimming full with so beneficial a liquor!

Justly is she affected with this sight; she is not transported

from her duty. I do not see her run forth into the street and proclaim her store, nor calling in her neighbours, whether to admire or bargain; I see her running to the prophet's door, and gratefully acknowledging the favour, and humbly depending on his directions, as not daring to dispose of that which was so wondrously given her without the advice of him by whose powerful means she had received it. Her own reason might have sufficiently suggested what to do; she dares not trust it, but consults with the oracle of God. If we would walk surely, we must do nothing without a word. Every action, every motion, must have a warrant. We can no more err with this guide than not err without him.

The prophet sets her in a right way; *Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debts, and live thou and thy children on the rest.* The first care is of her debts, the next of her maintenance. It should be gross injustice to raise means for herself and her charge ere she have discharged the arrearages of her husband. None of the oil was hers till her creditors were satisfied; all was hers that remained. It is but stealth to enjoy a borrowed substance. While she had nothing, it was no sin to owe; but when once her vessels were full, she could not have been guiltless if she had not paid before she stored. God and his prophet were bountiful; after the debts paid, they provide not only against the thraldom of her charge, but against the want. It is the just care of a religious heart to defend the widow and children of a prophet from distress and penury.

Behold the true servant and successor of Elijah. What he did to the Sareptan widow, this did [he] to the widow of a prophet. That increase of oil was by degrees, this at once; both equally miraculous: this so much more charitable as it less concerned himself.

He that gives kindnesses doth by turns receive them. Elisha hath relieved a poor woman, is relieved by a rich. The Shunamite, a religious and wealthy matron, invites him to her house; and now, after the first entertainment, finding his occasions to call him to a frequent passage that way, moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for the man of God.

It was his holiness that made her desirous of such a guest. Well might she hope that such an inmate would pay a blessing for his houserent. O happy Shunamite, that might make herself the hostess of Elisha!

As no less dutiful than godly she imparts her desire to her

husband, whom her suit hath drawn to a partnership in this holy hospitality. Blessed of God is that man whose bed yields him an help to heaven.

The good Shunamite desires not to harbour Elisha in one of her wonted lodgings; she solicits her husband to build him a chamber on the wall, apart. She knew the tumult of a large family unfit for the quiet meditations of a prophet; retiredness is most meet for the thoughts of a seer.

Neither would she bring him to bare walls; but sets ready for him a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick, and whatever necessary utensils for his entertainment. The prophet doth not affect delicacy; she takes care to provide for his convenience. Those that are truly pious and devout think their houses and their hands cannot be too open to the messengers of God, and are most glad to exchange their earthly commodities for the others' spiritual. Superfluity should not fall within the care of a prophet, necessity must.

He that could provide oil for the widow could have provided all needful helps for himself. What room had there been for the charity and beneficence of others, if the prophet should have always maintained himself out of power?

The holy man is so far sociable as not to neglect the friendly offer of so kind a benefactor. Gladly doth he take up his new lodging; and, as well pleased with so quiet a repose and careful attendance, he sends his servant Gehazi with the message of his thanks, with a treaty of retribution; *Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?* An ingenuous disposition cannot receive favours without thoughts of return. A wise debtor is desirous to retribute in some kind, as may be most acceptable to his obligers. Without this discretion, we may offer such requitals as may seem goodly to us; to our friends worthless. Every one can choose best for himself. Elisha therefore, who had never been wanting in spiritual duties to so hospitable a friend, gives the Shunamite the election of her suit for temporal recompense also. No man can be a loser by his favour to a prophet.

It is a good hearing that an Elisha is in such grace at the court that he can promise himself access to the king in a friend's suit. It was not ever thus. The time was when his master heard, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* now, the late miracle which

Elisha wrought, in gratifying the three kings with water and victory, hath endeared him to the king of Israel; and now, "who but Elisha?" Even that rough mantle finds respect amongst those silks and tissues. As bad as Jehoram was, yet he honoured the man of God. He that could not prevail with an idolatrous king in a spiritual reformation, yet can carry a civil suit.

Neither doth the prophet, in a sullen discontentment, fly off from the court because he found his labours unprofitable; but still holds good terms with that prince whom he cannot reclaim; and will make use notwithstanding of his countenance in matters whether of courtesy or justice. We may not cast off our due respects even to faulty authority; but must still submit and persist where we are repelled.

Not to his own advancement doth Elisha desire to improve the king's favour, but to the behoof, to the relief of others. If the Shunamite have business at the court she shall need no other solicitor. There cannot be a better office, nor more beseeming a prophet, than to speak in the cause of the dumb; to befriend the oppressed, to win greatness unto the protection of innocence.

The good matron needs no shelter of the great; *I dwell among mine own people;* as if she said, "The courtesy is not small in itself, but not useful to me. I live here quietly in a contented obscurity; out of the reach either of the glories or cares of a court; free from wrongs, free from envies; not so high as to provoke an evil eye, not so low as to be trodden on. I have neither fears nor ambitions. My neighbours are my friends; my friends are my protectors, and, if I should be so unhappy as to be the subject of main injuries, would not stick to be mine advocates. This favour is for those that either affect greatness or groan under oppressions; I do neither; for *I live among mine own people.*" O Shunamite, thou shalt not escape envy! Who can hear of thy happy condition and not say, "Why am not I thus?"

If the world afford any perfect contentment it is in a middle estate; equally distant from penury, from excess: it is in a calm freedom, a secure tranquillity, a sweet fruition of ourselves, of ours.

But what hold is there of these earthly things? how long is the Shunamite thus blessed with peace? Stay but a while, you shall see her come on her knees to the king of Israel, pitifully complaining that she was stripped of house and land: and now Gehazi is fain to do that good office for her which was not ac-

cepted from his master. Those that stand fastest upon earth have but slippery footing. No man can say that he shall not need friends.

Modesty sealed up the lips of the good Shunamite; she was ashamed to confess her longing; Gehazi easily guessed that her barrenness could not but be her affliction. She was childless; her husband old: Elisha gratifies her with the news of a son; *About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.* How liberal is God by his prophet in giving beyond her requests! Not seldom doth his bounty overreach our thoughts, and meet us with those benefits which we thought too good for us to ask.

Greatness and inexpectation makes the blessing seem incredible: *Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie to thine handmaid.* We are never sure enough of what we desire. We are not more hard to believe than loath to distrust beneficial events.

She well knew the prophet's holiness could not stand with wilful falsehood. Perhaps she might think it spoken by way of trial, not of serious affirmation: as unwilling therefore that it should not be, and willing to hear that pleasing word seconded, she says, *Do not lie to thine handmaid.*

Promises are made good, not by iteration, but by the effect: the Shunamite conceives, and bears a son at the set season. How glad a mother she was, those know best that have mourned under the discomfort of a sad sterility.

The child grows up, and is now able to find out his father in the field amongst his reapers. His father now grew young again with the pleasure of his sight; and more joyed in this spring of his hopes than in all the crops of his harvest.

But what stability is there in these earthly delights? The hot beams of the sun beat upon that head which too much care had made tender and delicate. The child complains to his father of his pain! O, that grace could teach us what nature teaches infants, in all our troubles to bemoan ourselves to our heavenly Father! He sends him to his mother. Upon her lap, about noon, the child dies; as if he would return his soul into that bosom from which it was derived to him.

The good Shunamite hath lost her son, her faith she hath not lost. Passion hath not robbed her of her wisdom. As not distracted with an accident so sudden, so sorrowful, she lays her dead child upon the prophet's bed; she locks the door; she hides her

grief, lest that consternation might hinder her design; she hastens to her husband; and, as not daring to be other than officious in so distressful an occasion, acquaints him with her journey, though not with the cause; requires of him both attendance and conveyance.

She posts to mount Carmel. She cannot so soon find out the man of God as he hath found her. He sees her afar off; and, like a thankful guest, sends his servant hastily to meet her, to inquire of the health of herself, her husband, her child. Her errand was not to Gehazi, it was to Elisha. No messenger shall interrupt her; no ear shall receive her complaint but the prophet's. Down she falls passionately at his feet; and forgetting the fashion of her bashful strangeness, lays hold of him, whether in an humble veneration of his person or in a fervent desire of satisfaction. Gehazi, who well knew how uncouth, how unfit this gesture of salutation was for his master, offers to remove her, and admonisheth her of her distance. The merciful prophet easily apprehends that no ordinary occasion could so transport a grave and well-governed matron; as therefore pitying her unknown passion, he bids, *Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.* If extremity of grief have made her unmannerly, wise and holy Elisha knows how to pardon it. He dares not add sorrow to the afflicted. He can better bear an unseemliness in her greeting than cruelty in her molestation.

Great was the familiarity that the prophet had with his God; and as friends are wont mutually to impart their counsels to each other, so had the Lord done to him. Elisha was not idle on mount Carmel. What was it that he saw not from thence? Not heaven only, but the world was before him; yet the Shunamite's loss is concealed from him, neither doth he shame to confess it. Ofttimes those that know greater matters may yet be ignorant of the less. It is no disparagement to any finite creature not to know something. By her mouth will God tell the prophet what by vision he had not; *Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?*

Deep sorrow is sparing of words. The expostulation could not be more short, more quick, more pithy. "Had I begged a son, perhaps my importunity might have been yielded to in anger. Too much desire is justly punished with loss. It is no marvel if what we wring from God prosper not. This favour to me was of

thine own motion; thy suit, O Elisha, made me a mother. Couldst thou intend to torment me with a blessing? How much more easy had the want of a son been than the miscarriage! barrenness, than orbation? Was there no other end of my having a son than that I might lose him? O man of God, let me not complain of a cruel kindness. Thy prayers gave me a son, let thy prayers restore him. Let not my dutiful respects to thee be repaid with an aggravation of misery. Give not thine handmaid cause to wish that I were but so unhappy as thou foundest me. O woful fruitfulness, if I must now say, that I had a son!"

I know not whether the mother or the prophet were more afflicted; the prophet for the mother's sake, or the mother for her own.

Not a word of reply do we hear from the mouth of Elisha, his breath is only spent in the remedy. He sends his servant with all speed to lay his staff upon the face of the child, charging him to avoid all the delays of the way.

Had not the prophet supposed that staff of his able to beat away death, why did he send it? and if upon that supposition he sent it, how was it that it failed of effect? Was this act done out of human conceit, not out of instinct from God? or did the want of the mother's faith hinder the success of that cure?

She, not regarding the staff or the man, holds fast to Elisha; no hopes of his message can loose her fingers: *As the Lord liveth, and as my soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* She imagined that the servant, the staff, might be severed from Elisha; she knew that wherever the prophet was, there was power. It is good relying upon those helps that cannot fail us.

Merit and importunity have drawn Elisha from Carmel to Shunem: he finds his lodging taken up by that pale carcass: he shuts his door, and falls to his prayers: this staff of his, whatever became of the other, was long enough he knew to reach up to heaven; to knock at those gates, yea, to wrench them open. He applies his body to those cold and senseless limbs: by the fervour of his soul he reduces that soul; by the heat of his body he educeth warmth out of that corpse. The child neeseth seven times, and as if his spirit had been but hid for the time, not departed, it falls to work afresh; the eyes look up, the lips and hands move. The mother is called in to receive a new life in her twice-given son; she comes in full of joy, full of wonder, and bows

herself to the ground, and falls down before those feet which she had so boldly laid hold of in Carmel.

O strong faith of the Shunamite, that could not be discouraged with the seizure and continuance of death; raising up her heart still to an expectation of that life which to the eyes of nature had been impossible, irrevocable! O infinite goodness of the Almighty, that would not suffer such faith to be frustrate; that would rather reverse the laws of nature, in returning a guest from heaven, and raising a corpse from death, than the confidence of a believing heart should be disappointed!

How true an heir is Elisha of his master, not in his graces only, but in his actions! Both of them divided the waters of Jordan; the one as his last act, the other as his first: Elijah's curse was the death of the captains and their troops; Elisha's curse was the death of the children: Elijah rebuked Ahab to his face; Elisha Jehoram: Elijah supplied the drought of Israel by rain from heaven; Elisha supplied the drought of the three kings by waters gushing out of the earth: Elijah increased the oil of the Sareptan; Elisha increased the oil of the prophet's widow: Elijah raised from death the Sareptan's son, Elisha the Shunamite's: both of them had one mantle, one spirit; both of them climbed up one Carmel, one heaven.

ELISHA WITH NAAMAN.—2 Kings v.

Of the full showers of grace which fell upon Israel and Judah, yet some drops did light upon their neighbours. If Israel be the worse for her nearness to Syria, Syria is the better for the vicinity of Israel. Amongst the worst of God's enemies some are singled out for mercy.

Naaman was a great warrior, an honourable courtier, yet a leper. No disease incident to the body is so nasty, so loathsome as leprosy. Greatness can secure no man from the most odious and wearisome condition. How little pleasure did this Syrian peer take, to be stooped to by others, while he hated to see himself. Even those that honoured him avoided him; neither was he other than abhorred of those that flattered him; yea, his hand could not move to his mouth without his own detestation: the basest slave of Syria would not change skins with him if he might have his honour to boot. Thus hath the wise God thought meet

to sauce the valour, dignity, renown, victories, of the famous general of the Syrians. Seldom ever was any man served with simple favours. These compositions make both our crosses tolerable and our blessings wholesome.

The body of Naaman was not more tainted with this lepry than his soul was tainted with Rimmon; and besides his idolatry, he was a professed enemy to Israel, and successful in his enmity. How far doth God fetch about his purposes! The leprosy, the hostility of Naaman, shall be the occasions of his salvation; that leprosy shall make his soul sound, that hostility shall adopt him a son of God.

In some prosperous inroads that the Syrians under Naaman's conduct have made into the land of Israel a little maid is taken captive; she shall attend on Naaman's wife, and shall suggest to her mistress the miraculous cures of Elisha. A small chink may serve to let in much light. Her report finds credit in the court, and begets both a letter from the king and a journey of his peer. While the Syrians thought of nothing but their booty, they bring happiness to the house of Naaman; the captivity of a poor Hebrew girl is a means to make the greatest lord of Syria a subject to God.

It is good to acquaint our children with the works of God, with the praises of his prophets. Little do we know how they may improve this knowledge, and whither they may carry it; perhaps the remotest nations may light their candle at their coal.

Even the weakest intimations may not be neglected; a child, a servant, a stranger, may say that which we may bless God to have heard.

How well did it become the mouth of an Israelite to extol a prophet; to wish the cure of her master, though an Aramite; to advise that journey unto the man of God, by whom both body and soul might be cured! True religion teacheth us pious and charitable respects to our governors, though aliens from the commonwealth of God.

No man, that I hear, blames the credulity of Naaman. Upon no other ground doth the king of Syria send his chief peer with his letters to the king of Israel, from his hands requiring the cure. The Syrian supposed that whatever a subject could do, a sovereign might command; that such a prophet could neither be out of the knowledge nor out of the obedience to his prince. Never did he dream of any exemption; but imagining Jehoram to be no less a

king of prophets than of people, and Elisha no less a subject than a seer, he writes, *Now when this letter is come to thee, behold, I have herewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.*

Great is the power of princes; every man's hand is theirs, whether for skill or for strength. Besides the eminency of their own gifts, all the subordinate excellencies of their subjects are no less at their service than if they were inherent in their persons. Great men are wanting to their own perfections if they do not both know and exercise the graces of their inferiors.

The king of Israel cannot read the letter without amazement of heart, without rending of garments; and says, *Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider and see, I pray you, how he seeketh a quarrel against me.* If God have vouchsafed to call kings gods, it well becomes kings to call themselves men, and to confess the distance wherein they stand to their Maker. Man may kill; man cannot kill and make alive; yea, of himself he can do neither. With God, a worm or a fly may kill a man; without God, no potentate can do it: much less can any created power both kill and revive; since, to restore life is more than to bereave it, more than to continue it, more than to give it: and if leprosy be a death, what human power can either inflict or cure it?

It is a trouble to a well-affected heart to receive impossible commands; to require that of an inferior which is proper to the Highest is a derogation from that supreme power whose property it is. Had Jehoram been truly religious, the injury done to his Maker in this motion, as he took it, had more afflicted him than the danger of his own quarrel. Belike, Elisha was not in the thoughts of the king of Israel. He might have heard that this prophet had made alive one whom he killed not: himself with the two other kings had been eyewitnesses of what Elisha could do; yet now the calves of Dan and Bethel have so often taken up his heart, that there is no room for the memory of Elisha; whom he sued to in his extremity, now his prosperity hath forgotten. Carnal hearts, when need drives them, can think of God and his prophet; when their turn is served, can as utterly neglect them as if they were not.

Yet cannot good Elisha repay neglect and forgetfulness. He listens what is done at the court; and finding the distress of his sovereign, proffers that service which should have been required:

Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

It was no small fright from which Elisha delivers his king. Jehoram was in awe of the Syrians ever since their late victory, wherein his father Ahab was slain, Israel and Judah discomfited. Nothing was more dreadful to him than the frowns of these Aramites. The quarrel which he suspected to be hatched by them is cleared by Elisha; their leper shall be healed; both they and Israel shall know they have neglected a God whose prophet can do wonders. Many eyes, doubtless, are fastened upon the issue of this message.

But what state is this that Elisha takes upon him? He doth not say, "I will come to him;" but, *Let him come now to me.* The three kings came down once to his tent; it is no marvel if he prevent not the journey of a Syrian courtier. It well beseems him that will be a suitor for favour to be obsequious. We may not stand upon terms of our labour or dignity where we expect a benefit.

Naaman comes, richly attended with his troops of servants and horses, and waits in his chariot at the door of a prophet. I do not hear Elisha call him in; for though he were great, yet he was leprous: neither do I see Elisha come forth to him, and receive him with such outward courtesies as might be fit for an honourable stranger; for in those rich clothes the prophet saw an Aramite, and perhaps some tincture of the late-shed blood of Israel: rather, that he might make a perfect trial of the humility of that man whom he means to gratify and honour, after some short attendance at his door, he sends his servant with a message to that peer who could not but think the meanest of his retinue a better man than Gehazi's master.

What could the prophet have done other to the lacquey of Naaman's man? He that would be a meet subject of mercy must be thoroughly abased in his own conceit, and must be willingly pliable to all the conditions of his humiliation.

Yet, had the message carried in it either respect to the person or probability of effect, it could not have been unwelcome; now it sounded of nothing but sullenness and unlikelihood; *Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.*

What wise man would take this for any other than a mere scorn and mockery; *Go, wash?* Alas! what can water do? It

can cleanse from filthiness, not from leprosy. And why in Jordan? what differs that from other streams? and why just seven times? What virtue is either in that channel or in that number?

Naaman can no more put off nature than leprosy. In what a chafe did he fling away from the prophet's door, and says, "Am I come thus far to fetch a flout from an Israelite? Is this the issue both of my journey and the letters of my king? Could this prophet find no man to play upon but Naaman? Had he meant seriously, why did he think himself too good to come forth unto me? Why did he not touch me with his hand, and bless me with his prayers, and cure me with his blessing? Is my misery fit for his derision? If water could do it, what needed I to come so far for this remedy? Have I not oft done thus in vain? Have we not better streams at home than any Israel can afford? *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?*"

Folly and pride strive for place in a natural heart, and it is hard to say whether is more predominant; folly, in measuring the power of God's ordinances by the rule of human discourse and ordinary event; pride, in a scornful valuation of the institutions of God in comparison of our own devices.

"*Abana* and *Pharpar*, two for one: *rivers*, not waters *of Damascus*, a stately city, and incomparable: *Are they not?* Who dares deny it? *Better*, not as good; *than the waters*, not the rivers; all the waters, Jordan and all the rest; *of Israel*, a beggarly region to Damascus."

Nowhere shall we find a true pattern of the disposition of nature; how she is altogether led by sense and reason; how she fondly judges of all objects by the appearance; how she acquaints herself only with the common road of God's proceedings; how she sticks to her own principles; how she misconstrues the intentions of God; how she over-conceits her own; how she disdains the mean conditions of others; how she upbraids her opposites with the proud comparison of her own privileges. Nature is never but like herself. No marvel if carnal minds despise the foolishness of preaching, the simplicity of sacraments, the homeliness of ceremonies, the seeming inefficacy of censures. These men look upon Jordan with Syrian eyes, one drop of whose water, set apart by divine ordination, hath more virtue than all the streams of Abana and Pharpar.

It is a good matter for a man to be attended with wise and

faithful followers. Many a one hath had better counsel from his heels than from his elbows. Naaman's servants were his best friends. They came to him, and spake to him, and said, *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?*

These men were servants, not of the humour, but of the profit of their master. Some servile spirits would have cared only to soothe up, not to benefit their governor, and would have encouraged his rage by their own: "Sir, will you take this at the hand of a base fellow? Was ever man thus flouted? Will you let him carry it away thus? Is any harmless anger sufficient revenge for such an insolence? Give us leave at least to pull him out by the ears, and force him to do that by violence which he would not do out of good manners. Let our fingers teach this saucy prophet what it is to offer an affront to a prince of Syria." But these men loved more their master's health than his passion, and had rather therefore to advise than flatter, to draw him to good than follow him to evil. Since it was a prophet from whom he received this prescription, they persuade him not to despise it; intimating there could be no fault in the slightness of the receipt so long as there was no defect of power in the commander; that the virtue of the cure should be in his obedience, not in the nature of the remedy.

They persuade, and prevail. Next to the prophet, Naaman may thank his servants that he is not a leper. He goes down upon their entreaty, and dips seven times in Jordan: his flesh riseth; his leprosy vanisheth: not the unjust fury and techiness of the patient shall cross the cure, lest, while God is severe, the prophet should be discredited.

Long enough might Naaman have washed there in vain, if Elisha had not sent him. Many a leper hath bathed in that stream and hath come forth no less impure. It is the word, the ordinance of the Almighty, which puts efficacy into those means which of themselves are both impotent and improbable. What can our font do to the washing away of sin? If God's institution shall put virtue into our Jordan, it shall scour off the spiritual leprosies of our hearts, and shall more cure the soul than cleanse the face.

How joyful is Naaman to see this change of his skin, this renovation of his flesh, of his life! Never did his heart find such warmth of inward gladness as in this stream.

Upon the sight of his recovery he doth not post home to the court or to his family, to call for witnesses, for partners of his joy; but thankfully returns to the prophet by whose means he received this mercy. He comes back with more contentment than he parted with rage.

Now will the man of God be seen of that recovered Syrian whom he would not see leprous. His presence shall be yielded to the gratulation which was not yielded to the suit. Purposely did Elisha forbear before, that he might share no part of the praise of this work with his Maker, that God might be so much more magnified as the means were more weak and despicable.

The miracle hath his due work. First doth Naaman acknowledge the God that wrought it, then the prophet by whom he wrought it: *Behold, now I know there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.* O happy Syrian, that was at once cured of his leprosy and his misprision of God! Naaman was too wise to think that either the water had cured him or the man: he saw a divine power working in both; such as he vainly sought from his heathen deities: with the heart therefore he believes, with the mouth he confesses.

While he is thus thankful to the Author of his cure, he is not unmindful of the instrument; *Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.* Naaman came richly furnished with ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, ten changes of raiment: all these and many more would the Syrian peer have gladly given to be delivered from so noisome a disease; no marvel if he importunately offer some part of them to the prophet now that he is delivered: some testimony of thankfulness did well where all earthly recompense was too short. The hands of this man were no less full of thanks than his mouth. Dry and barren professions of our obligations, where is power to requite, are unfit for noble and ingenuous spirits.

Naaman is not more frank in offering his gratuity than Elisha vehement in refusing it: *As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.* Not that he thought the Syrian gold impure; not that he thought it unlawful to take up a gift where he hath laid down a benefit; but the prophet will remit of Naaman's purse that he may win of his soul. The man of God would have his new convert see cause to be more enamoured of true piety, which teacheth her clients to contemn those worldly riches and glories which base worldlings adore; and would have him think that

these miraculous powers are so far transcending the valuation of all earthly pelf, that those glittering treasures are worthy of nothing but contempt in respect thereof: hence it is, that he who refused not the Shunamite's table and stool and candlestick will not take Naaman's present. There is much use of godly discretion in directing us when to open, when to shut our hands.

He that will not be allowed to give, desires yet to take: *Shall there not, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' load of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but unto the Lord.* Israelitish mould lay open to his carriage without leave of Elisha; but Naaman regards not to take it unless it may be given him, and given him by the prophet's hand. Well did this Syrian find that the man of God had given a supernatural virtue to the water of Israel, and therefore supposed he might give the like to his earth. Neither would any earth serve him but Elisha's; else the mould of Israel had been more properly craved of the king than the prophet of Israel.

Doubtless it was devotion that moved this suit. The Syrian saw God had a propriety [property] in Israel, and imagines that he will be best pleased with his own. On the sudden was Naaman half a proselyte.

Still here was a weak knowledge with strong intentions. He will sacrifice to the Lord; but where? in Syria, not in Jerusalem. Not the mould but the altar is that God respects; which he hath allowed nowhere but in his chosen Sion.

This honest Syrian will be removing God home to his country; he should have resolved to remove his home to God: and though he vows to offer no sacrifice to any other god, yet he craves leave to offer an outward courtesy to Rimmon; though not for the idol's sake, yet for his master's: *In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon, to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.*

Naaman goes away resolute to profess himself an Israelite for religion. All the Syrian court shall know that he sacrifices upon Israelitish earth to the God of Israel. They shall hear him protest to have neither heart nor knee for Rimmon. If he must go into the house of that idol, it shall be as a servant, not as a suppliant: his duty to his master shall carry him, not his devotion to his master's god: if his master go to worship there, not he:

neither doth he say, "When I bow myself to the image of Rimmon;" but, *in the house.* He shall bow to be leaned upon, not to adore.

Yet, had not Naaman thought this a fault, he had not craved a pardon. His heart told him that a perfect convert should not have abidd the roof, the sight, the air of Rimmon; that his observance of an earthly master should not draw him to the semblance of an act of outward observance to the rival of his Master in heaven; that a sincere detestation of idolatry could not stand with so unseasonable a courtesy.

Far, therefore, is Naaman from being a pattern, save of weakness, since he is yet more than half a Syrian; since he willingly accuses himself, and, instead of defending, deprecates his offence. It is not for us to expect a full stature in the cradle of conversion. As nature, so grace, rises by many degrees to perfection. Leprosy was in Naaman cured at once, not corruption.

The prophet, as glad to see him but thus forward, dismisses him with a civil valediction. Had an Israelite made this suit, he had been answered with a check; thus much from a Syrian was worthy a kind farewell.

They are parted. Gehazi cannot thus take his leave. His heart is maled up in the rich chests of Naaman, and now he goes to fetch it. The prophet and his man had not looked with the same eyes upon the Syrian treasure; the one, with the eye of contempt, the other, with the eye of admiration and covetous desire. The disposition of the master may not be measured by the mind, by the act of his servant. Holy Elisha may be attended by a false Gehazi. No examples, no counsels will prevail with some hearts.

Who would not have thought that the follower of Elisha could be no other than a saint? yet, after the view of all those miracles, this man is a mirror of worldliness. He thinks his master either too simple or too kind to refuse so just a present from a Syrian; himself will be more wise, more frugal. Desire hastens his pace: he doth not go, but run, after his booty.

Naaman sees him; and, as true nobleness is ever courteous, alights from his chariot to meet him. The great lord of Syria comes forth of his coach to salute a prophet's servant, not fearing that he can humble himself over much to one of Elisha's family. He greets Gehazi with the same word wherewith he lately was dimitted by his master; *Is it peace?* So sudden a messenger might seem to argue some change.

He soon receives from the breathless bearer news of his master's

health and request; *All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give me, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.* Had Gehazi craved a reward in his own name, calling for the fee of the prophet's servant, as the gain, so the offence had been the less: now, reaching at a greater sum, he belies his master, robs Naaman, burdens his own soul.

What a sound tale hath the craft of Gehazi devised, of the number, the place, the quality, the age of his master's guests, that he might set a fair colour upon that pretended request; so proportioning the value of his demand as might both enrich himself and yet well stand with the moderation of his master! Love of money can never keep good quarter with honesty, with innocence. Covetousness never lodged in the heart alone; if it find not, it will breed wickedness. What a mint of fraud there is in a worldly breast! how readily can it coin subtle falsehood for an advantage!

How thankfully liberal was this noble Syrian! Gehazi could not be more eager in taking than he was in giving. As glad of so happy an occasion of leaving any piece of his treasure behind him, he forces two talents upon the servant of Elisha; and binds them in two bags, and lays them upon two of his own servants. His own train shall yield porters to Gehazi. Cheerfulness is the just praise of our beneficence. Bountiful minds are as zealous in overpaying good turns as the niggardly are in scanting retributions.

What projects do we think Gehazi had all the way? How did he please himself with the waking dreams of purchases, of traffic, of jollity! and now, when they are come to the tower, he gladly disburdens and dismisses his two Syrian attendants, and hides their load, and wipes his mouth, and stands boldly before that master whom he had so foully abused.

O Gehazi! where didst thou think God was this while? Couldst thou thus long pour water upon the hands of Elisha and be either ignorant or regardless of that undeceivable eye of Providence which was ever fixed upon thy hands, thy tongue, thy heart? Couldst thou thus hope to blind the eyes of a seer? Hear then thy indictment, thy sentence, from him whom thou thoughtest to have mocked with thy concealment: *Whence comest thou, Gehazi? Thy servant went no whither.*

He that had begun a lie to Naaman ends it to his master. Whoso lets his tongue once loose to a wilful untruth soon grows impudent in multiplying falsehoods.

Of what metal is the forehead of that man that dares lie to a prophet? What is this but to outface the senses? "*Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?* Didst thou not till now know, O Gehazi, that prophets have spiritual eyes, which are not confined to bodily prospects? didst thou not know that their hearts were often where *they* were not? didst thou not know that thy secretest ways were overlooked by invisible witnesses? Hear then, and be convinced: hither thou wentest, thus thou saidst, thus thou didst, thus thou spedst."

What answer was now here but confusion? Miserable Gehazi! how didst thou stand, pale and trembling, before the dreadful tribunal of thy severe master; looking for the woful sentence of some grievous judgment for so heinous an offence? "*Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and,* which thou hadst already purchased in thy conceit, *oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?* did my mouth refuse that thy hands might take? was I so careful to win honour to my God and credit to my profession, by denying these Syrian presents, that thou mightest dash both in receiving them? was there no way to enrich thyself but by belying thy master, by disparaging this holy function in the eyes of a new convert? Since thou wouldst needs therefore take part of Naaman's treasure, take part with him in his leprosy; *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.*"

O heavy talents of Gehazi! O the horror of this one unchangeable suit, which shall never be but loathsomely white, noisomely unclean! How much better had been a light purse and a homely coat with a sound body, a clear soul! Too late doth that wretched man now find that he hath loaded himself with a curse; that he hath clad himself with shame. His sin shall be read ever in his face, in his seed: all passengers, all posterities shall now say, "Behold the characters of Gehazi's covetousness, fraud, sacrilege!"

The act overtakes the word; *he went out of his presence a leper as white as snow.* It is a woful exchange that Gehazi hath made with Naaman. Naaman came a leper, returned a disciple; Gehazi came a disciple, returned a leper: Naaman left behind both his disease and money; Gehazi takes up both his money

and his disease. Now shall Gehazi never look upon himself but he shall think of Naaman, whose skin is transferred upon him with those talents; and shall wear out the rest of his days in shame and pain and sorrow. His tears may wash off the guilt of his sin; shall not, like another Jordan, wash off his leprosy: that shall ever remain, as an hereditary monument of divine severity. This son of the prophets shall more loud and lively preach the justice of God by his face than others by their tongue. Happy was it for him, if, while his skin was snow-white with leprosy, his humble soul were washed white as snow with the water of true repentance.

ELISHA RAISING THE IRON; BLINDING THE ASSYRIANS.—2 Kings vi.

There was no loss of Gehazi: when he was gone, the prophets increased. An ill man in the Church is but like some shrubby tree in a garden, whose shade keeps better plants from growing. A blank doth better in a room than an ill filling. The view of God's just judgments doth rather draw clients unto him than alienate them.

The kings of Israel had succeeded in idolatry and hate of sincere religion, yet the prophets multiply. Persecution enlargeth the bounds of the Church. These very tempestuous showers bring up flowers and herbs in abundance. There would have been neither so many nor so zealous prophets in the languishments of peace.

Besides, what marvel is it, if the immediate succession of two such noble leaders as Elijah and Elisha established and augmented religion, and bred multitudes of prophets? Rather, who cannot marvel, upon the knowledge of all their miracles, that all Israel did not prophesy? It is a good hearing that the prophets want elbowroom; out of their store, not out of the envy of neighbours or incompetency of provision. Where vision fails, the people perish; they are blessed, where it abounds.

When they found themselves straitened, they did not presume to carve for themselves; but they craved the leave, the counsel of Elisha; *Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.* It well becomes the sons

of the prophets to enterprise nothing without the allowance of their superiors.

Here was a building towards, none of the curiousest. I do not see them making means for the procurement of some cunning artificers, nor for the conquisition of some costly marbles and cedars; but every man shall hew and square and frame his own beam. No nice terms were stood upon by these sons of the prophets. Their thoughts were fixed upon the perfection of a spiritual building. As an homely roof may serve them, so their own hands shall raise it. The fingers of these contemplative men did not scorn the axe and mallet and chisel. It was better being there than in Obadiah's cave; and they that dwell now contentedly under rude sticks will not refuse the squared stones and polished contignations of better times. They shall be ill teachers of others that have not learned both to want and to abound.

The master of this sacred society, Elisha, is not stately nor austere. He gives not only passage to this motion of his collegiates, but assistance. It was fit the sons of the prophets should have convenience of dwelling, though not pomp, not costliness.

They fall to their work. No man goes slackly about the building of his own house.

One of them, more regarding the tree than the tool, lets fall the head of the axe into the river. Poor men are sensible of small losses. He makes his moan to Elisha; *Alas, master! for it was borrowed.* Had the axe been his own, the trouble had been the less to forego it; therefore doth the miscarriage afflict him, because it was of a borrowed axe. Honest minds are more careful of what they have by loan than by propriety [property]. In lending there is a trust, which a good heart cannot disappoint without vexation.

Alas, poor novices of the prophet; they would be building, and were not worth their axes! if they would give their labour, they must borrow their instruments. Their wealth was spiritual. Outward poverty may well stand with inward riches. He is rich, not that hath the world, but that can contemn it.

Elisha loves and cherishes this just simplicity. Rather will he work a miracle than a borrowed axe shall not be restored.

It might easily be imagined, he that could raise up the iron out of the bottom of the water could tell where it fell in; yet even that powerful hand calls for direction. In this one point the son of the prophet knows more than Elisha. The notice of parti-

cularities is neither fit for a creature nor communicable. A mean man may best know his own case: this novice better knows where his axe fell than his master: his master knows better how to get it out than he.

There is no reason to be given of supernatural actions. The prophet borrows an axe to cut a helve for the lost axe. Why did he not make use of that handle which had cast the head? Did he hold it unworthy of respect, for that it had abandoned the metal wherewith it was trusted? or did he make choice of a new stick that the miracle might be the more clear and unquestionable?

Divine power goes a contrary way to art. We first would have procured the head of the axe, and then would have fitted it with a helve; Elisha fits the head to the helve, and causeth the wood, which was light, and knew not how to sink, to fetch up the iron, which was heavy, and naturally incapable of supernatation.

Whether the metal were stripped of the natural weight by the same power which gave it being, or whether, retaining the wonted poise, it was raised up by some spiritual operation, I inquire not: only I see it swim like cork upon the stream of Jordan, and move towards the hand that lost it. What creature is not willing to put off the properties of nature at the command of the God of nature? O God, how easy is it for thee, when this hard and heavy heart of mine is sunk down into the mud of the world, to fetch it up again by thy mighty word, and cause it to float upon the streams of life, and to see the face of heaven again!

Yet still do the sides of Israel complain of the thorns of Aram. The children of Ahab rue their father's unjust mercy. From an enemy, it is no making question whether of strength or wile. The king of Syria consults with his servants where to encamp for his greatest advantage. Their opinion is not more required than their secrecy.

Elisha is a thousand scouts. He sends word to the king of Israel of the projects, of the removes of his enemy. More than once had Jehoram saved both his life and his host by these close admonitions. It is well that in something yet a prophet may be obeyed.

What strange state-service was this which Elisha did, besides the spiritual! The king, the people of Israel, owe themselves and their safety to a despised prophet! The man of God knew and felt them idolaters; yet how careful and vigilant is he for their

rescue! If they were bad, yet they were his own; if they were bad, yet not all; God had his number amongst their worst: if they were bad, yet the Syrians were worse. The Israelites misworshipped the true God; the Syrians worshipped a false. That, if it were possible, he might win them, he will preserve them; and if they will needs be wanting to God, yet Elisha will not be wanting to them; their impiety shall not make him undutiful.

There cannot be a juster cause of displeasure than the disclosing of those secret counsels which are laid up in our ear, in our breast. The king of Syria, not without reason, stomachs this supposed treachery. What prince can bear that an adverse power should have a party a pensionary in his own court?

How famous was Elisha even in foreign regions! Besides Naaman, others of the Syrian nobility take notice of the miraculous faculties of this prophet of Israel. He is accused for this secret intelligence. No words can escape him though spoken in the bedchamber. O Syrian, whosoever thou wert, thou saidst not enough. If thy master do but whisper in thine ear, if he smother his words within his own lips, if he do but speak within his own bosom, Elisha knows it from an infallible information. What counsel is it, O God, that can be hid from thee? what counsel is it that thou wilt hide from thy seer? Even this very word that accuseth the prophet is known to the accused: he hears this tale while it is in telling: he hears the plot for his apprehension.

How ill do the projects of wicked men hang together! They that confess Elisha knows their secretest words do yet confer to take him! There are spies upon him whose espials have moved their anger and admiration.

He is descried to be in Dothan, a small town of Manasseh. A whole army is sent thither to surprise him. The opportunity of the night is chosen for the exploit. There shall be no want either in the number or valour or secrecy of these conspired troops; and now, when they have fully girt in the village with a strong and exquisite siege, they make themselves sure of Elisha; and please themselves to think how they have encaged the miserable prophet, how they should take him at unawares in his bed in the midst of a secure dream, how they should carry him fettered to their king, what thanks they should have for so welcome a prisoner.

The successor of Gehazi riseth early in the morning, and sees

all the city encompassed with a fearful host of foot, horse, chariots. His eyes could meet with nothing but woods of pikes, and walls of harness, and lustre of metals; and now he runs in, affrighted, to his master: *Alas, my master! what shall we do?* He had day enough to see they were enemies that environed them, to see himself helpless and desperate; and hath only so much life left in him as to lament himself to the partner of his misery. He cannot flee from his new master, if he would; he runs to him with a woful clamour, *Alas, my master! what shall we do?*

O the undaunted courage of faith! Elisha sees all this, and sits in his chamber so secure as if these had only been the guard of Israel for his safe protection.

It is an hard precept that he gives his servant, *Fear not.* As well might he have bid him not to see when he saw, as not to fear when he saw so dreadful a spectacle. The operations of the senses are no less certain than those of the affections where the objects are no less proper. But the task is easy if the next word may find belief; *for there are more with us than with them.* Multitude and other outward probabilities do both lead the confidence of natural hearts and fix it. It is for none but a David to say, *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.* Flesh and blood riseth and falleth according to the proportion of the strength or weakness of apparent means.

Elisha's man looked about him; yet his master prays, *Lord, open his eyes, that they may see.* Naturally we see not while we do see. Every thing is so seen as it is: bodily eyes discern bodily objects; only spiritual can see the things of God. Some men want both eyes and light; Elisha's servant had eyes, wanted illumination. No sooner were his eyes open than he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. They were there before; neither doth Elisha pray that those troops may be gathered, but that they may be seen; not till now were they descried. Invisible armies guard the servants of God while they seem most forsaken of earthly aid, most exposed to certain dangers. If the eyes of our faith be as open as those of our sense, to see angels as well as Syrians, we cannot be appalled with the most unequal terms of hostility. Those blessed spirits are ready either to rescue our bodies or to carry up our souls to blessedness, whether ever shall be enjoined by their Maker; there is just comfort in both, in either.

Both those chariots that came to fetch Elijah and those that came to defend Elisha were fiery. God is not less lovely to his own in the midst of his judgments, than he is terrible to his enemies in the demonstration of his mercies.

Thus guarded, it is no marvel if Elisha dare walk forth into the midst of the Syrians. Not one of those heavenly presidiaries struck a stroke for the prophet; neither doth he require their blows, only he turns his prayer to his God, and says, *Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.* With no other than deadly intentions did these Aramites come down to Elisha; yet doth not he say, "Smite them with the sword," but, *Smite them with blindness.* All the evil he wisheth to them is their repentance. There was no way to see their error but by blindness. He that prayed for the opening of his servant's eyes to see his safeguard, prays for the blinding of his enemies, that they might not see to do hurt.

As the eyes of Elisha's servant were so shut that they saw not the angels when they saw the Syrians, so the eyes of the Syrians shall be likewise shut, that when they see the man they shall not see the prophet. To all other objects their eyes are clear; only to Elisha they shall be blind; blind, not through darkness, but through misknowledge. They shall see and mistake both the person and place. He that made the senses can either hold or delude them at pleasure. How easily can he offer to the sight other representations than those which arise from the visible matter, and make the heart to believe them!

Justly now might Elisha say, "*This is not the way, neither is this the city* wherein Elisha shall be descried." He was in Dothan, but not as Elisha. He shall not be found but in Samaria, neither can they have any guide to him but himself.

No sooner are they come into the streets of Samaria than their eyes have leave to know both the place and the prophet. The first sight they have of themselves is in the trap of Israel, in the jaws of death. Those stately palaces, which they now wonder at unwillingly, carry no resemblance to them but of their graves. Every Israelite seems an executioner, every house a jail, every beam a gibbet. And now they look upon Elisha, transformed from their guide to their common murderer, with horror and paleness. It is most just with God to entangle the plotters of wickedness in their own snare.

How glad is a mortal enemy to snatch at all advantages of re-

venge! Never did the king of Israel see a more pleasing sight than so many Syrian throats at his mercy; and, as loath to lose so fair a day, as if his fingers itched to be dipped in blood, he says, *My father, shall I smite, shall I smite them?* The repetition argued desire; the compellation, reverence. Not without allowance of a prophet would the king of Israel lay his hand upon an enemy so miraculously trained home. His heart was still foul with idolatry, yet would he not taint his hand with forbidden blood. Hypocrisy will be still scrupulous in something, and, in some awful restraints, is a perfect counterfeit of conscience.

The charitable prophet soon gives an angry prohibition of slaughter; *Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?* As if he said, "These are God's captives, not thine; and if they were thine own, their blood could not be shed without cruelty. Though in the hot chases of war executions may be justifiable, yet, in the coolness of deliberation, it can be no other than inhuman to take those lives which have been yielded to mercy. But here thy bow and thy sword are guiltless of the success; only a strange providence of the Almighty hath cast them into thy hands whom neither thy force nor thy fraud could have compassed. If it be victory thou aimest at, overcome them with kindness; *Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink.*"

O noble revenge of Elisha, to feast his persecutors! to provide a table for those who had provided a grave for him! These Syrians came to Dothan full of bloody purposes to Elisha; he sends them from Samaria full of good cheer and jollity. Thus, thus should a prophet punish his pursuers. No vengeance but this is heroical, and fit for Christian imitation: *If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat; if he thirst, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head; and the Lord shall reward thee: be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The king of Israel hath done that by his feast which he could not have done by his sword. The bands of Syria will no more come by way of ambush or incursion into the bounds of Israel. Never did a charitable act go away without the retribution of a blessing. In doing some good to our enemies, we do most good to ourselves. God cannot but love in us this imitation of his mercy, who bids his sun shine and his rain fall where he is most provoked; and that love is never fruitless.

THE FAMINE OF SAMARIA RELIEVED.—2 Kings vii.

Not many good turns are written in marble. Soon have these Syrians forgotten the merciful beneficence of Israel. After the forbearance of some hostile inroad, all the forces of Syria are mustered against Jehoram. That very Samaria which had relieved the distressed Aramites is by the Aramites besieged, and is affamished by those whom it had fed.

The famine within the walls was more terrible than the sword without. Their worst enemy was shut within, and could not be dislodged of their own bowels.

Whither hath the idolatry of Israel brought them? Before, they had been scourged with war, with drought, with dearth, as with single cord: they remain incorrigible; and now God twists two of these bloody lashes together, and galls them even to death.

There need no other executioners than their own maws. Those things which in their nature were not edible, at least to an Israelite, were now both dear and dainty. The ass was, besides the untoothsomeness, an impure creature. That which the law of ceremonies had made unclean, the law of necessity had made delicate and precious. The bones of so carrion a head could not be picked for less than four hundred[a] pieces of silver.

Neither was this scarcity of victuals only, but of all other necessaries for human use. That the belly might not complain alone, the whole man was equally pinched.

The king of Israel is neither exempted from the judgment nor yet yields under it. He walks upon the walls of his Samaria, to oversee the watches set, the engines ready, the guards changed, together with the posture of the enemy; when a woman cries to him out of the city, *Help, my lord, O king!*

Next to God, what refuge have we in all our necessities but his anointed? Earthly sovereignty can aid us in the case of the injustice of men, but what can it do against the judgments of God? *If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?* Even the greatest powers must stoop to afflictions in themselves, how should they be able to prevent them in others? To sue for aid where is an utter im-

[a] [In the Wycliffe Version of Forshall and Madden, the following is a marginal note on 2 Kings vi. 25: "hundrid *E pr. v.* score *sec. v.*" *E* being one of the oldest MS. Versions, "certainly before 1390." See preface to Wycliffe, p. xviii. 29 and xlvii. 65.]

potence of redress, is but to upbraid the weakness and aggravate the misery of those whom we implore.

Jehoram mistakes the suit. The suppliant calls to him for a woful piece of justice. Two mothers have agreed to eat their sons: the one hath yielded hers to be boiled and eaten; the other, after she hath taken her part of so prodigious a banquet, withdraws her child, and hides him from the knife. Hunger and envy make the plaintiff importunate, and now she craves the benefit of royal justice. She that made the first motion withholds her part of the bargain, and flies from that promise whose trust had made this mother childless. O the direful effects of famine, that turns off all respects of nature, and gives no place to horror, causing the tender mother to lay her hands, yea, her teeth, upon the fruit of her own body, and to receive that into her stomach which she hath brought forth of her womb!

What should Jehoram do? The match was monstrous. The challenge was just, yet unnatural. This complainant had purchased one half of the living child by the one half of hers, dead. The mother of the surviving infant is pressed by covenant, by hunger, restrained by nature. To force a mother to deliver up her child to voluntary slaughter had been cruel; to force a debtor to pay a confessed arrearage seemed but equal. If the remaining child be not dressed for food, this mother of the devoured child is both robbed and famished; if he be, innocent blood is shed by authority. It is no marvel if the question astonished the judge; not so much for the difficulty of the demand as the horror of the occasion.

To what lamentable distress did Jehoram find his people driven! Not without cause did the king of Israel rend his garments and show his sackcloth. Well might he see his people branded with that ancient curse which God had denounced against the rebellious: *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee of a fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters. The tender and delicate woman, her eyes shall be evil towards her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward the children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness.*

He mourns for the plague: he mourns not for the cause of this

plague; his sin, and theirs. I find his sorrow, I find not his repentance. The worst man may grieve for his smart, only the good heart grieves for his offence.

Instead of being penitent, Jehoram is furious, and turns his rage from his sins against the prophet; *God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day.* Alas! what hath the righteous done? Perhaps Elisha, that we may imagine some colours of this displeasure, forethreatened this judgment; but they deserved it: perhaps he might have averted it by his prayers; their unrepentance disabled him: perhaps he persuaded Jehoram to hold out the siege; though through much hardness, he foresaw the deliverance. In all this, how hath Elisha forfeited his head? All Israel did not afford an head so guiltless as this that was destined to slaughter. This is the fashion of the world; the lewd blame the innocent, and will revenge their own sins upon others' uprightness.

In the midst of all this sad estate of Samaria, and these storms of Jehoram, the prophet sits quietly in his own house amongst his holy consorts; bewailing no doubt both the sins and misery of their people, and prophetically conferring of the issue; when suddenly God reveals to him the bloody intent and message of Jehoram, and he at once reveals it to his fellows; *See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head?* O the inimitable liberty of a prophet! The same God that shewed him his danger suggested his words: he may be bold where we must be awful.

Still is Naboth's blood laid in Jehoram's dish. The foul fact of Ahab blemisheth his posterity; and now, when the son threats violence to the innocent, murder is objected to him as hereditary.

He that foresaw his own peril provides for his safety; *Shut the door, and hold him fast at the door.* No man is bound to tender his throat to an unjust stroke.

This bloody commission was prevented by a prophetical foresight. The same eye that saw the executioner coming to smite him, saw also the king hasting after him to stay the blow. The prophet had been no other than guilty of his own blood if he had not reserved himself a while for the rescue of authority.

O the inconstancy of carnal hearts! It was not long since Jehoram could say to Elisha, *My father, shall I smite them?* now he is ready to smite him as an enemy whom he honoured as a

father: yet again, his lips had no sooner given sentence of death against the prophet than his feet stir to recall it.

It should seem that Elisha, upon the challenges and expostulations of Jehoram's messenger, had sent a persuasive message to the king of Israel, yet a while to wait patiently upon God for his deliverance. The discontented prince flies off in an impotent anger; *Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?*

O the desperate resolutions of impatient minds! They have stinted God both for his time and his measure; if he exceed either, they either turn their backs upon him or fly in his face. The position was true, the inference deadly. All that evil was of the Lord: they deserved it, he sent it; what then? It should have been therefore argued, "He that sent it can remove it: I will wait upon his mercy under whose justice I suffer; impatience and distrust shall but aggravate my judgment: *It is the Lord, let him do what he will.*" But now to despair because God is just, to defy mercy because it lingers, to reject God for correction, it is a presumptuous madness, an impious pettishness.

Yet in spite of all these provocations, both of king and people, Elisha hath good news for Jehoram; *Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.* Miserable Israel now sees an end of this hard trial. One day's patience shall free them both of siege and famine. God's deliverances may overstay our expectation, not the due period of his own counsels. O infinite mercy! when man says, *No longer,* God says, *To-morrow.* As if he would condescend where he might judge, and would please them who deserved nothing but punishment.

The word seemed not more comfortable than incredible. *A lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?* Prophecies before they be fulfilled are riddles; no spirit can read them but that by which they are delivered.

It is a foolish and injurious infidelity to question a possibility where we know the message is God's. How easy is it for that omnipotent hand to effect those things which surpass all the reach of human conceit! Had God intended a miraculous multiplication, was it not as easy for him to increase the corn or meal of Samaria as the widow's oil? was it not as easy for him to give plenty of

victuals without opening the windows of heaven, as to give plenty of water without wind or rain?

The Almighty hates to be distrusted. This peer of Israel shall rue his unbelief; *Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof;* the sight shall be yielded for conviction, the fruition shall be denied for punishment. Well is that man worthy to want the benefit which he would not believe. Who can pity to see infidelity excluded from the blessings of earth, from the glory of heaven?

How strange a choice doth God make of the intelligencers of so happy a change! Four lepers sit at the entering of the gate. They see nothing but death before them; famine within the walls, the enemy without. The election is woful: at last they resolve upon the lesser evil. "Famine is worse than the Syrian. In the famine there is certainty of perishing; amongst the Syrians, hazard. Perhaps the enemy may have some pity, hunger hath none; and, were the death equally certain, it were more easy to die by the sword than by famine."

Upon this deliberation they come down into the Syrian camp, to find either speed of mercy or despatch. Their hunger would not give them respite till morning. By twilight are they fallen upon the uttermost tents. *Behold, there was no man.* They marvel at the silence and solitude. They look, and listen. The noise of their own feet affrighted them. Their guilty hearts supplied the Syrians, and expected fearfully those which were as fearfully fled.

How easily can the Almighty confound the power of the strong, the policy of the wise! God puts a panic terror into the hearts of the proud Syrians. He makes them hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host. They say one to other, *Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us:* they arise therefore in a confused rout; and, leaving all their substance behind them, flee for their lives. Not long before, Elisha's servant saw chariots and horses, but heard none; now these Syrians hear chariots and horses, but see none: that sight comforted his heart, this sound dismayed theirs. The Israelites heard no noise within the walls; the lepers heard no noise without the gates; only the Syrians heard this noise in their camp. What a scorn doth God put upon these presumptuous Aramites! He will not vouchsafe to use any substantial stratagem against them.

Nothing but an empty sound shall scatter them, and send them home empty of substance, laden with shame, half dead with fear. The very horses, that might have hastened their flight, are left tied in their tents. Their very garments are a burden. All is left behind, save their very bodies; and those, breathless for speed.

Doubtless these Syrians knew well to what miserable exigencies the enclosed Israelites were brought by their siege; and now made full account to sack and ransack their Samaria: already had they divided and swallowed the prey, when suddenly God puts them into a ridiculous confusion, and sends them to seek safety in their heels: no booty is now in price with them but their life, and happy is he that can run fastest. Thus the Almighty laughs at the designs of insolent men, and shuts up their counsels in shame.

The fear of the four lepers begins now to give way to security. They fill their bellies, and hide their treasures, and pass from one tent to another, in a fastidious choice of the best commodities: they who erewhile would have held it happiness enough to have been blessed with a crust, now wantonly rove for dainties, and from necessity leap into excess.

How far self-love carries us in all our actions, even to the neglect of the public! Not till their own bellies and hands and eyes were filled did these lepers think of imparting this news to Israel: at last, when themselves are glutted, they begin to remember the hunger of their brethren, and now they find room for remorse; *We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.* Nature teaches us, that it is an injury to engross blessings, and so to mind the private as if we had no relation to a community. We are worthy to be shut out of the city gates for lepers, if the respects to the public good do not oversway us in all our desires, in all our demeanour; and well may we with these covetous lepers fear a mischief upon ourselves, if we shall wilfully conceal blessings from others.

The conscience of this wrong and danger sends back the lepers into the city. They call to the porters, and soon transmit the news to the king's household. The king of Israel complains not to have his sleep broken with such intelligence; he ariseth in the night, and not contemning good news, though brought by lepers, consults with his servants of the business.

We cannot be too jealous of the intentions of an enemy. Je-

horam wisely suspects this flight of the Syrians to be but simulatory and politic; only to draw Israel out of their city, for the spoil of both. There may be more peril in the back of an enemy than in his face; the cruelest slaughters have been in retiring; easily therefore is the king persuaded to adventure some few forlorn scouts for further assurance. The word of Elisha is out of his head, out of his heart, else there had been no place for this doubt. Timorous hearts never think themselves sure. Those that have no faith had need of much sense.

Those few horses that remain are sent forth for discovery. They find nothing but monuments of frightfulness, pledges of security.

Now Israel dares issue forth to the prey. There, as if the Syrians had come thither to enrich them, they find granaries, wardrobes, treasures, and whatever may serve either for use or ostentation. Every Israelite goes away filled, laden, wearied with the wealthy spoil.

As scarcity breeds dearth, so plenty cheapness. To-day, a measure of fine flour is lower rated than yesterday of dung.

The distrustful peer of Israel sees this abundance according to the word of the prophet, but enjoys it not. He sees this plenty can come in at the gate, though the windows of heaven be not open. The gate is his charge; the affamished Israelites press in upon him, and bear him down in the throng. Extreme hunger hath no respect to greatness. Not their rudeness, but his own unbelief hath trampled him under feet. He that abased the power of God by his distrust is abased worthily to the heels of the multitude. Faith exalts a man above his sphere; infidelity depresses him into the dust, into hell. He that believes not is condemned already.

CONTEMPLATIONS

UPON THE

HISTORICAL PART

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT.

THE SEVENTH AND LAST VOLUME.

TO THE HIGH AND MIGHTY MONARCH,

CHARLES,

BY THE GRACE OF GOD KING OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, AND IRELAND,

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH ; &c.

MY DREAD SOVEREIGN LORD AND MASTER.

May it please your Majesty,—Now at last, thanks be to my good God, I have finished the long task of my meditations upon the historical part of the Old Testament; a work that I foresaw must be the issue both of time and thoughts. It presumed to entitle itself at first to your gracious name, in succession to your immortal brother's, and now it brings to your royal hands a due account of a happy despatch.

Besides mine own public engagement, the encouragements of many worthy divines, both at home and abroad, drew me on, in this pleasing though busy labour, and made me believe the service would not be of more pain than use.

I humbly present it to your Majesty; not fearing to say, that, in regard of the subject, it is not so fit for any eyes as princely: for what doth it else but comment upon that which God hath thought good to say of kings; what they have done, what they should have done; how they sped in good, in evil? Certainly, there can be none such mirror of princes under heaven as this, which God hath made for the faces of his deputies on earth. Neither can the eyes of sovereign greatness be better taken up than with this sacred reflection. If my defects have not been notorious, the matter shall enough commend the work; which, together with the unworthy author, humbly casts itself at the feet of your Majesty, with the best vows of fidelity and observance from him that prides himself in nothing more than in the style of

Your Majesty's most faithfully devoted servant,

JOS. HALL.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK XX.

THE SHUNAMITE SUING TO JEHORAM; ELISHA CONFERRING WITH HAZAEL.—2 Kings viii.

How royally hath Elisha paid the Shunamite for his lodging! To him already she owes the life of her son, both given and restored; and now again, after so many years as might well have worn out the memory of so small a courtesy, herself, her son, her family, owe their lives to so thankful a guest. That table, and bed, and stool, and candlestick was well bestowed: that candlestick repaid her the light of her future life and condition; that table, the means of maintenance; that stool, a seat of safe abode; that bed, a quiet rest from the common calamities of her nation. He is a niggard to himself that scants his beneficence to a prophet, whose very cold water shall not go unrewarded.

Elijah preserved the Sareptan from famine; Elisha, the Shunamite: he, by provision of oil and meal; this, by premonition; *Arise, and go, thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn.* The Sareptan was poor, and driven to extremes; therefore the prophet provides for her from hand to mouth: the Shunamite was wealthy, and therefore the prophet sends her to provide for herself. The same goodness that relieves our necessity leaves our competency to the hand of our own counsel: in the one, he will make use of his own power, in the other, of our providence.

The very prophet advises this holy client to leave the bounds of the Church, and to seek life where she should not find religion. Extremity is for the time a just dispensation with some common rules of our outward demeanour and motions, even from better to worse. All Israel and Judah shall be affamished; the body can be preserved nowhere but where the soul shall want. Sometimes the conveniences of the soul must yield to bodily necessities. Wantonness and curiosity can find no advantage from that which is done out of the power of need.

It is a long famine that shall afflict Israel. He upon whom the spirit of Elijah was doubled doubled the judgment inflicted by his master. Three years and a half did Israel gasp under the drought of Elijah; seven years' dearth shall it suffer under Elisha. The trials of God are many times not more grievous for their sharpness than for their continuance.

This scarcity shall not come alone. God shall call for it; whatever be the second cause, he is the first. The executioners of the Almighty (such are his judgments) stand ready waiting upon his just throne, and do no sooner receive the watchword than they fly upon the world and plague it for sin. Only the cry of our sins moves God to call for vengeance, and if God once call, it must come. How oft, how earnestly, are we called to repentance, and stir not! The messengers of God's wrath fly forth at the least beck, and fulfil the will of his revenge upon those whose obedience would not fulfil the will of his command.

After so many proofs of fidelity, the Shunamite cannot distrust the prophet; not staying therefore to be convicted by the event, she removes her family into the land of the Philistines. No nation was more opposite to Israel, none more worthily odious; yet there doth the Shunamite seek and find shelter. Even the shade of those trees that are unwholesome may keep us from a storm; everywhere will God find room for his own.

The fields of Philistines flourish, while the soil of Israel yields nothing but weeds and barrenness; not that Israel was more sinful, but that the sin of Israel is more intolerable. The offers of grace are so many aggravations of wickedness. In equal offences, those do justly smart more who are more obliged. No pestilence is so contagious as that which hath taken the purest air.

These Philistine neighbours would never have endured themselves to be pestered with foreigners, especially Israelites, whom they hated, besides religion, for their usurpation. Neither were they in all likelihood pressed with multitude. The rest of Israel were led on with hopes; presuming upon the amends of the next harvest, till their want grew desperate and irremediable. Only the forewarned Shunamite prevents the mischief. Now she finds what it is to have a prophet her friend. Happy are those souls that upon all occasions consult with God's seers; they shall be freed from the plagues wherein the secure blindness of others is heedlessly overtaken.

Seven years had this Shunamite sojourned in Palestine; now

she returns to her own, and is excluded. She that found harbour among Philistines finds oppression and violence among Israelites: those of her kindred, taking advantage of her absence, had shared her possessions. How oft doth it fall out that the worst enemies of a man are those of his own house!

All went by contraries with this Shunamite. In the famine she had enough; in the common plenty she was scanted; Philistines were kind unto her, Israelites cruel. Both our fears and our hopes do not seldom disappoint us. It is safe trusting to that stay which can never fail us, who can easily provide us both of friendship in Palestine and of justice in Israel.

We may not judge of the religion by particular actions. A very Philistine may be merciful when an Israelite is unjust. The person may be faulty when the profession is holy.

It was not long since the prophet made that friendly offer to the Shunamite out of the desire of a thankful requital, *What is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?* and she answered, *I dwell among my brethren.* Little did she then think of this injurious measure, else she might have said, "I dwell among mine enemies; I dwell among robbers." It is like they were then friendly who were now cruel and oppressive. There is no trust to be reposed in flesh and blood. How should their favours be constant who are in their nature and disposition variable? It is the surest way to rely on Him who is ever like himself, the measure of whose love is eternity.

Whither should the Shunamite go to complain of her wrong but to the court? There is no other refuge of the oppressed but public authority. All justice is derived from sovereignty. Kings are not called gods for nothing; they do both sentence and execute for the Almighty.

Doubtless now the poor Shunamite thought of the courteous proffer of Elisha, and, missing a friend at the court, is glad to be the presenter of her own petition.

How happily doth God contrive all events for the good of his! This suppliant shall fall upon that instant for her suit when the king shall be talking with Gehazi, when Gehazi shall be talking of her to the king. The words of Gehazi, the thoughts of the king, the desires of the Shunamite, shall be all drawn together by the wise providence of God into the centre of one moment, that his oppressed servant might receive a speedy justice. O the infi-

nite wisdom, power, mercy of our God, that insensibly orders all our ways; as to his own holy purposes, so to our best advantage!

What doth Jehoram the king, talking with Gehazi the leper? That very presence was an eyesore; but if the cohabitation with the infectious were forbidden, yet not the conference.

Certainly, I begin to think of some goodness in both these. Had there not been some goodness in Jehoram, he had not taken pleasure to hear, even from a leprous mouth, the miraculous acts and praises of God's prophet; had there not been some goodness in Gehazi, he had not, after so fearful an infliction of judgment, thus ingenuously recounted the praises of his severe master.

He that told that dearbought lie to the prophet, tells now all truths of the prophet to the king. Perhaps his leprosy had made him clean; if so, happy was it for him that his forehead was white with the disease, if his soul became hereupon white with repentance.

But we may well know that the desire or report of historical truths doth not always argue grace. Still Jehoram, after the inquiry of the prophet's miracles, continues his idolatry. He that was curious to hearken after the wonders of Elisha is not careful to follow his doctrine: therefore are Gehazi and the Shunamite met before him, that he may be convicted who will not be reformed. Why was it else, that the presence of the persons should thus unexpectedly make good the relation, if God had not meant the inexcusableness of Jehoram, while he must needs say within himself, "Thus potent is the prophet of that God whom I obey not. Were not Elisha's the true God, how could he work such wonders? and if he be the true God, why is he not mine? But what? Shall I change Ahab's God for Jehoshaphat's? No; I cannot deny the miracles; I will not admit of the author. Let Elisha be powerful, I will be constant."

O wretched Jehoram! how much better had it been for thee never to have seen the face of Gehazi and the son of the Shunamite, than to go away unmoved with the vengeance of leprosy in the one, with the merciful resuscitation of the other! Therefore is thy judgment fearfully aggravated, because thou wouldst not yield to what thou couldst not oppose. Had not Ahab's obdurateness been propagated to his son, so powerful demonstrations of divine power could not have been ineffectual. Wicked hearts are so much worse by how much God is better. This anvil is the

harder by being continually beaten upon, whether with judgments or mercy.

Yet, this good use will God have made of this report and this presence, that the poor Shunamite shall have justice. That son whose life was restored shall have his inheritance revived; his estate shall fare the better for Elisha's miracles. How much more will our merciful God second his own blessings, when the favours of unjust men are therefore drawn to us, because we have been the subjects of divine beneficence.

It was a large and full award that this occurrence drew from the king; *Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land even until now.* Not the present possession only is given her, but the arrearages. Nothing hinders but that outward justice may stand with gross idolatry. The widow may thank Elisha for this. His miracle wrought still, and puts this new life in her dead estate. His absence did that for the preservation of life which his presence did for the restoring it from death. She that was so ready to expostulate with the man of God upon the loss of her son might perhaps have been as ready to impute the loss of her estate to his advice: now that for his sake she is enriched with her own, how doth she bless God for so happy a guest! When we have forgotten our own good turns, God remembers and crowns them. Let us do good to all while we have time, but especially to the household of faith.

Could Israel have been sensible of their own condition, it was no small unhappiness to lose the presence of Elisha. Whether for the idolatries or for the famine of Israel, the prophet is gone into Syria. No doubt Naaman welcomed him thither; and now would force upon him thanks for his cure, which the man of God would not receive at home.

How famous is he now grown that was taken from the team! his name is not confined to his own nation; foreign countries take notice of it, and kings are glad to listen after him, and woo him with presents. Benhadad, the king of Syria, whose counsels he had detected, rejoiceth to hear of his presence; and now, as having forgotten that he had sent a whole host to besiege the prophet in Dothan, sends an honourable messenger to him, laden with the burden of forty camels, to consult with this oracle concerning his sickness and recovery.

This Syrian, belike, in distress dares not trust to his own gods; but, having had good proof of the power of the God of Israel, both in Naaman's cure and in the miraculous defeats of his greatest forces, is glad to send to that servant of God whom he had persecuted. Wicked men are not the same in health and in sickness; their affliction is worthy of the thanks, if they be well minded; not themselves.

Doubtless, the errand of Benhadad was not only to inquire of the issue of his disease, but to require the prayers of the prophet for a good issue. Even the worst man doth so love himself, that he can be content to make a beneficial use of those instruments whose goodness he hateth.

Hazael, the chief peer of Syria, is designed to this message. The wealth of his present strives with the humility of his carriage and speech; *Thy son Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?* Not long since, Jehoram king of Israel had said to Elisha, *My father, shall I smite them?* and now Benhadad king of Syria says, "My father, shall I recover?"

Lo how this poor Meholathite hath kings to his sons! How great is the honour of God's prophets with pagans, with princes! Who can but be confounded to see evangelical prophets despised by the meanest Christians?

It is more than a single answer that the prophet returns to this message. One answer he gives to Benhadad that sent it; another he gives to Hazael that brings it: that to Benhadad is, *Thou mayest surely recover:* that to Hazael, *The Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.* What shall we say then? Is there a lie or an equivocation in the holy mouth of the prophet? God forbid. It is one thing, what shall be the nature and issue of the disease; another thing, what may outwardly befall the person of Benhadad. The question is moved of the former; whereto the answer is direct: the disease is not mortal: but withal an intimation is given to the bearer, of an event beyond the reach of his demand; which he may know, but either needs not or may not return; *The Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die:* by another means, though not by the disease.

The seer of God descries more in Hazael than he could see in himself: he fixes his eyes therefore steadfastly in the Syrian's face, as one that in those lines read the bloody story of his life.

Hazael blushes; Elisha weeps. The intension of those eyes did

not so much amaze Hazael as the tears. As yet, he was not guilty to himself of any wrong that might strain out this juice of sorrow; *Why weepeth my lord?*

The prophet fears not to foretell Hazael all the villanies which he should once do to Israel; how he should fire their forts, and kill their young men, and rip the mothers, and dash their children.

I marvel not now at the tears of those eyes which foresaw this miserable vastation of the inheritance of God, the very mention whereof is abhorred of the future author; "*What, is thy servant a dog, that I should do this great thing?* They are savage cruelties whereof thou speakest. It were more fit for me to weep that thou shouldest repute me so brutish. I should no less condemn myself for a beast, if I could suspect my own degeneration so far."

Wicked men are carried into those heights of impiety which they could not in their good mood have possibly believed. Nature is subject to favourable opinions of itself, and will rather mistrust a prophet of God than her own good disposition. How many from honest beginnings have risen to incredible licentiousness; whose lives are now such, that it were as hard for a man to believe they had ever been good, as to have persuaded them once they should prove so desperately ill!

To give some overture unto Hazael of the opportunity of this ensuing mischief, the prophet foretells him from God that he shall be the king of Syria.

He that shows the event doth not appoint the means. Far was it from the spirit of God's prophet to set or encourage a treason; while he said therefore, *Thou shalt be king of Syria,* he said not, "Go home, and kill thy master:" the wicked ambition of Hazael draws this damnable conclusion out of holy premises; and now, having fed the hopes of his sovereign with the expectation of recovery, the next day he smothers his master. The impotent desire of rule brooks no delay. Had not Hazael been gracelessly cruel, after he had received this prediction of the seer, he should have patiently awaited for the crown of Syria, till lawful means had set it upon his head. Now he will, by a close execution, make way to the throne. A wet cloth hath stopped the mouth of his sick sovereign. No noise is heard: the carcass is fair. Who can complain of any thing but the disease?

O Hazael! thou shalt not thus easily stop the mouth of thine own conscience; that shall call thee traitor, even in thy chair of

state; and shall check all thy royal triumphs with, "Thou hast founded thy throne in blood." I am deceived if this wet cloth shall not wipe thy lips in thy jolliest feasts, and make thy best morsels unsavoury. Sovereignty is painful upon the fairest terms, but upon treachery and murder, tormenting. Woful is the case of that man whose public cares are aggravated with private guiltiness, and happy is he that can enjoy a little with the peace of an honest heart.

JEHU WITH JEHORAM AND JEZEBEL.—2 Kings ix.

Yet Hazael began his cruelty with loss. Ramoth Gilead is won from him. Jehoram the son hath recovered that which Ahab his father attempted in vain.

That city was dearbought of Israel; it cost the life of Ahab, the blood of Jehoram. Those wounds were healed with victory. The king tends his health at Jezreel, while the captains were enjoying and seconding their success at Ramoth.

Old Elisha hath neither cottage nor foot of land; yet, sitting in an obscure corner, he gives order for kingdoms: not by way of authority, (this usurpation had been no less proud than unjust,) but by way of message from the God of kings. Even a mean herald may go on a great errand. The prophets of the gospel have nothing to do but with spiritual kingdoms; to beat down the kingdoms of sin and Satan, to translate souls to the kingdom of heaven.

He that renewed the life of the Shunamite's son must stoop to age. That block lies in his way to Jehu. The aged prophet employs a speedier messenger, who must also gird up his loins for haste. No common pace will serve us when we go on God's message; the very loss of minutes may be unrecoverable.

This great seer of God well saw a present concurrence of all opportunities: the captains of the host were then readily combined for this exploit; the army was on foot; Jehoram absent: a small delay might have troubled the work: the dispersion of the captains and host or the presence of the king might either have defeated or slacked the despatch. He is prodigal of his success that is slow in his execution.

The directions of Elisha to the young prophet are full and punctual; whither to go; what to carry; what to do; where to do

it; what to say; what speed to make, in his act, in his return. In the businesses of God, it matters not how little is left to our discretion. There is no important business of the Almighty wherein his precepts are not strict and express; look, how much more specialty there is in the charge of God, so much more danger is in the violation.

The young prophet is curiously obedient; in his haste; in his observation and carriage: and finding Jehu, according to Elisha's prediction, set amongst the captains of the host, he singles him forth by a reverent compellation: *I have an errand to thee, O captain.* Might not the prophet have stayed till the table had risen, and then have followed Jehu to his lodging? Surely the wisdom of God hath purposely pitched upon this season, that the public view of a sacred messenger, and the hasty evocation of so noted a person to such a secrecy, might prepare the hearts of those commanders of Israel to the expectation of some great design.

The inmost room is but close enough for this act. Ere many hours, all Israel shall know that which yet may not be trusted with one eye. The goodness of God makes wise provision for the safety of his messengers, and while he employs their service prevents their dangers.

But how is it, that of all the kings of the ten tribes none was ever anointed but Jehu? Is it for that the God who would not countenance the erection of that usurped throne would countenance the alteration? or is it that by this visible testimony of divine ordination the courage of the Israelitish captains might be raised up to second the high and bold attempt of him whom they saw destined from heaven to rule?

Together with the oil of this unction here was a charge of revenge; a revenge of the blood of the prophets upon Jezebel; of wickedness and idolatry upon Ahab: neither was the extirpation of this lewd family foreprophesied only to Jehu, but enjoined.

Elijah foretold, and the world expected, some fearful account of the abominable cruelty and impiety of that accursed house. Now it is called for when it seemed forgotten. Ahab shall have no posterity; Jezebel shall have no tomb but the dogs. This woful doom is committed to Jehu's execution.

O the sure though patient justice of the Almighty! Not only Ahab and Jezebel had been bloody and idolatrous, but Israel was drawn into the partnership of their crimes. All these shall share

in the judgment. Elijah's complaint in the cave now receives this late answer; Hazael shall plague Israel; Jehu shall plague the house of Ahab and Jezebel. Elisha's servant thus seconds Elisha's master. When wickedness is ripe in the field, God will not let it shed to grow again, and cuts it up by a just and seasonable vengeance. Ahab's drooping under the threat hath put off the judgment from his own days; now it comes and sweeps away his wife, his issue, and falls heavy upon his subjects. Please yourselves, O ye vain sinners, in the slow pace of vengeance. It will be neither less certain nor more easy for the delay; rather it were to pay for that leisure in the extremity.

The prophet hath done his errand, and is gone. Jehu returns to his fellows with his head not more wet with oil than busied with thoughts. No doubt his face bewrayed some inward tumults and distractions of imagination, neither seemed he to return the same he went out. They ask therefore, *Is all well? Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?*

The prophets of God were to these idolatrous Israelites like comets, who were never seen without the portendment of a mischief. When the priests of their Baal were quietly sacrificing, all was well; but now, when a prophet of God comes in sight, their guiltiness asks, *Is all well?* All would be well but for their sins. They fear not these, they fear their reprover.

Israel was come to a good pass when the prophets of God went with them for madmen. O ye Baalitish ruffians, whither hath your impiety and profaneness carried you, that ye should thus blaspheme the servants of the living God? Ye that run on madding after vain idols tax the sober guides of true worship for madness! Thus it becomes the godless enemies of truth, the heralds of our patience, to miscall our innocence, to revile our most holy profession. What wonder is it that God's messengers are madmen unto those to whom the wisdom of God is foolishness?

The message was not delivered to Jehu for a concealment, but for publication. Silence could not effect the word that was told him; common notice must: "*Ye know the man, and his communication.* The habit shows you the man, the calling shows you his errand." Even prophets were distinguished by their clothes. Their mantle was not the common wear. Why should not this sacred vocation be known by a peculiar attire? These captains had not called him a madman if they had not known him a prophet. By the man therefore they might guess at his message.

Prophets do not use to appear but upon serious errands, whether of reproof or of prediction.

Nice civilities of denials were not then known to the world. They said, *It is false; tell us now.* Amongst these captains no combat, no unkindness follows, upon a word so rudely familiar.

Jehu needs not tell them that the man was a prophet: he tells them the prophecy of the man; what he had said, what he had done.

Their eyes had no sooner seen the oil, their ears had no sooner heard, *Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel,* than they rise from their seats, as rapt with a tempest, and are hurled into arms. So do they haste to proclaim Jehu, that they scarce stay to snatch up their garments; which they had perhaps left behind them for speed, had they not meant with these rich habiliments to garnish a state for their new sovereign. To whom, having now erected an extemporal throne, they do by the sound of trumpets give the style of royalty, *Jehu is king.*

So much credit hath that mad fellow with these gallants of Israel, that upon his word they will presently adventure their lives and change the crown. God gives a secret authority to his despised servants, so as they which hate their person yet reverence their truth: even very scorners cannot but believe them. If when the prophets of the gospel tell us of a spiritual kingdom they be distrusted of those which profess to observe them, how shameful is the disproportion! how just shall their judgment be!

Yet I cannot say whether mere obedience to the prophet, or personal dislikes of Jehoram, or partial respects to Jehu, drew the captains of Israel. The will of God may be done thanklessly, when, fulfilling the substance, we fail of the intention, and err in circumstance.

Only Ramoth is conscious of this sudden inauguration. This new princedom yet reaches no farther than the sound of the trumpet. Jehu is no less subtle than valiant. He knew that the notice of this unexpected change might work a busy and dangerous resistance; he therefore gives order that no messenger of the news may prevent his personal execution; that so he might surprise Jehoram in his palace of Jezreel, whether tending his late wounds, or securely feasting his friends and dreaming of nothing less than danger; and might be seen and felt at once. Secrecy is the safest guard of any design. Disclosed projects are either frustrated or made needlessly difficult.

Neither is Jehu more close than swift. That very trumpet with the same wind sounds his march. From the top of the stairs he steps down into his chariot. That man means to speed who can be at once reserved in his counsels and resolute and quick in his performances.

Who could but pity the unhappy and unseasonable visitation of the grandchild of Jehoshaphat, were it not that he was degenerate into the family of Ahab? Ahaziah king of Judah is come to visit Jehoram king of Israel. The knowledge of his late received wounds hath drawn thither this kind ill-matched ally. He who was partner of the war cannot but be a visitor of the wounds.

The two kings are in the height of their compliment and entertainments when the watchman of the tower of Jezreel espies a troop afar off. For aught was known, there was nothing but peace in all the land of Israel; and Judah was now so combined with it, that both their kings were feasting under one roof; yet in the midst of this supposed safety, the watchtower is not unfurnished with heedy eyes. No security of peace can free wise governors from a careful suspicion of what may come, and a providence against the worst. Even while we know of no enemies, the watchtower of due intelligence may not be empty.

In vain are dangers foreseen if they be not premonished. It is all one to have a blind and a mute watchman. This speaks what he sees; *I see a company.*

Doubtless Jehoram's head was now full of thoughts; neither knew he what construction to put upon this approaching troop. "Perhaps the Syrians," he thinks, "may have recovered Ramoth, and chased the garrison of Israel." Neither can he imagine whether these should be hostile victors, or vanquished subjects, or conspiring rebels. Every way this rout was dreadful. O Jehoram, thou beginnest thy fears too late. Hadst thou been afraid to provoke the God of Israel, thine innocency had yielded no room to these terrors.

A horseman is despatched to discover the meaning of this descried concourse. He meets them, and inquires of peace, but receives a short answer; *What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.* A second is addressed, with the same success. Both attend the train of Jehu instead of returning. Indeed, it is not for private persons to hope to rectify the public affairs when they are grown to a height of disorder, and from thence to a

ripeness of miscarriage. Sooner may a wellmeaning man hurt himself than redress the common danger.

These messengers were now within the mercy of a multitude. Had they but endeavoured to retire, they had perished as wilfully as vainly. Whosoever will be striving against the torrent of a just judgment must needs be carried down in the stream. Sometimes there is as much wisdom in yielding as courage in resistance.

Had this troop been far off, the watchman could not have descried the arrival of the messengers, their turning behind, the manner of the march. Jehu was a noted captain. His carriage and motion was observed more full of fire than his fellows: *The driving is like Jehu's; for he driveth furiously.* God makes choice of fit instruments, as of mercy, so of revenge. These spirits were needful for so tragical a scene as was now preparing in Israel.

Jehoram and Ahaziah, as nettled with this forced patience of expectation, can no longer keep their seats, but will needs hasten their chariots, and fetch that costly satisfaction which would not be sent but given.

They are infatuated which shall perish; otherwise Jehoram had been warned enough, by the forcible retention of his messengers, to expect none but an enemy; a friend or a subject could not have been unwilling to be known, to be looked for; now, forgetting his wounds, he will go to fetch death.

Yet when he sees Jehu, whom he left a subject, hopes strive with his doubts; "*Is it peace, Jehu?* What may be the reason of this sudden journey? Is the army foiled by the Syrians? Is Ramoth recovered? or hath the flight of the enemy left thee no further work? or is some other ill news guilty of thy haste? What means this unwished presence and return?"

There needs no stay for an answer. The very face of Jehu and those sparkling eyes of his speak fury and death to Jehoram, which yet his tongue angrily seconds; "*What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?* Wicked tyrant, what speakest thou of peace with men when thou hast thus long waged war with the Almighty? That cursed mother of thine hath nursed thee with blood and trained thee up in abominable idolatries. Thou art not more hers than her sin is thine. Thou art polluted with her spiritual whoredoms and enchanted with her hellish witchcrafts. Now that just God whom thou and thy parents have so heinously despited sends

thee by me this last message of his vengeance;" which while he spake his hand is drawing up that deadly arrow which shall cure the former wounds with a worse.

Too late now doth wretched Jehoram turn his chariot and flee, and cry, "Treason, O Ahaziah." There was treason before, O Jehoram: thy treason against the majesty of God is now revenged by the treason of Jehu against thee. That fatal shaft, notwithstanding the swift pace of both the chariots, is directed to the heart of Jehoram. There is no erring of those feathers which are guided by the hand of Destiny.

How just are the judgments of God! It was in the field of Naboth wherein Jehoram met with Jehu: that very ground called to him for blood. And now this new avenger remembers that prophecy which he heard from the mouth of Elijah, in that very place, following the heels of Ahab, and is careful to perform it. Little did Jehu think when he heard that message of Elijah that his hands should act it; now, as zealous of accomplishing the word of a prophet, he gives charge to Bidkar his captain that the bleeding carcass of Jehoram should be cast upon that very plat of Naboth. O Naboth's blood well paid for! Ahab's blood is licked by dogs in the very place where those dogs licked Naboth's; Jehoram's blood shall manure that ground which was wrung from Naboth, and Jezebel shall add to this compost! O garden of herbs dearly bought, royally dunged!

What a resemblance there is betwixt the death of the father and the son, Ahab and Jehoram! both are slain in their chariot, both with an arrow, both repay their blood to Naboth; and how perfect is this retaliation! not only Naboth miscarried in that cruel injustice, but his sons also, else the inheritance of the vineyard had descended to his heirs, notwithstanding his pretended offence; and now not only Ahab forfeits his blood to this field, but his son Jehoram also. Face doth not more answer to face than punishment to sin.

It was time for Ahaziah king of Judah to flee; nay, it had been time long before to have fled from the sins, yea from the house of Ahab. That brand is fearful which God sets upon him; *He did evil in the sight of the Lord,* as did the house of Ahab; for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. Affinity is too often guilty of corruption. The son of good Jehoshaphat is lost in Ahab's daughter.

Now he pays for his kind alliance; accompanying the son of

Ahab in his death, whom he consorted with in his idolatry. Young Ahaziah was scarce warm in his throne when the mismatched blood of Athaliah is required from him. Nothing is more dangerous than to be imped in a wicked family: this relation too often draws in a share both of sin and punishment.

Who would not have looked that Jezebel, hearing of this bloody end of her son, and pursuit of her ally, and the fearful proceedings of this prosperous conspiracy, should have put herself into sackcloth and ashes; and now, finding no means either of defence or escape, should have cast herself into such a posture of humiliation as might have moved the compassion of Jehu? Her proud heart could not suddenly learn to stoop; rather, she recollects her high spirits; and, instead of humbling her soul by repentance, and addressing herself for an imminent death, she pranks up her old carcass, and paints her wrinkled face, and, as one that vainly hopes to daunt the courage of an usurper by the sudden beams of majesty, she looks out, and thinks to fright him with the challenge of a traitor whose either mercy or justice could not be avoided. Extremity finds us such as our peace leaves us. Our last thoughts are spent upon that we care most for. Those that have regarded their face more than their soul, in their latter end are more taken up with desire of seeming fair than being happy. It is no marvel if a heart obdured with the custom of sin shut up gracelessly. Counterfeit beauty agrees well with inward uncleanness.

Jehu's resolution was too strongly settled to be removed with a painted face or an opprobrious tongue. He looks up to the window, and says, *Who is on my side, who?* There want not those everywhere which will be ready to observe prevailing greatness. Two or three eunuchs look out. He bids them *throw her down.* They instantly lay hold on their lately-adored mistress, and, notwithstanding all her shrieks and prayers, cast her down headlong into the street.

What heed is to be taken of the deep-professed services of hollow-hearted followers! All this while they have humbly, with smiles and officious devotions, fawned upon their great queen: now, upon the call of a prosperous enemy, they forget their respects, her royalty, and cast her down, as willing executioners, into the jaws of a fearful death. It is hard for greatness to know them whom it may trust. Perhaps the fairest semblance is from the falsest heart.

It was a just plague of God upon wicked Jezebel that she was inwardly hated of her own. He whose servants she persecuted raised up enemies to her from her own elbow.

Thus must pride fall. Insolent, idolatrous, cruel Jezebel besprinkles the walls and pavement with her blood; and now those brains that devised mischief against the servants of God are strewed upon the stones, and she that insulted upon the prophets is trampled upon by the horses' heels: *The wicked is kept for the day of destruction, and shall be brought forth to the day of wrath,* Job xxi. 30.

Death puts an end commonly to the highest displeasure. He that was severe in the execution of the living is merciful in the sepulture of the dead; *Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter.* She that upbraided Jehu with the name of Zimri shall be interred by Jehu as Omri's daughter-in-law, as a Sidonian princess. Somewhat must be yielded to humanity, somewhat to state.

The dogs have prevented Jehu in his purpose, and have given her a living tomb, more ignoble than the worst of the earth. Only the scull, hands, and feet of that vanished carcass yet remain: the scull, which was the roof of all her wicked devices; the hands and feet, which were the executioners. These shall remain as the monuments of those shameful exequies; that future times, seeing these fragments of a body, might say, "The dogs were worthy of the rest." Thus Jezebel is turned to dung and dogs' meat; Elijah is verified; Naboth is revenged; Jezreel is purged; Jehu is zealous; and, in all, God is just.

JEHU KILLING THE SONS OF AHAB AND THE PRIESTS OF BAAL.

2 Kings x.

There were two prime cities of the ten tribes which were the set courts of the kingdom of Israel, Samaria and Jezreel. The chief palace of the kingdom was Jezreel, the mother city of the kingdom was Samaria. Jehu is possessed of the one, without any sword drawn against him: Jezreel willingly changes the master; yielding itself to the victor of two kings, to the avenger of Jezebel. The next care is Samaria: either policy or force shall fetch in that head of the tribes.

The plentiful issue of princes is no small assurance to the people. Ahab had sons enough to furnish the thrones of all the neighbour nations, to maintain the hopes of succession to all times. How secure did he think the perpetuation of his posterity when he saw seventy sons from his own loins! Neither was this royal issue trusted either to weak walls or to one roof, but to the strong bulwarks of Samaria, and therein to the several guards of the chief peers. It was the wise care of their parents not to have them obnoxious to the danger of a common miscarriage, or of those emulations which wait upon the cloyedness of an undivided conversation, but to order their separation so as one may rescue other from the peril of assault, as one may respect other out of a familiar strangeness. Had Ahab and Jezebel been as wise for their souls as they were for their seed, both had prospered.

Jehu is yet but in his first act. If all the sons of Ahab bleed not, the prophecy is unanswered.

There shall be no need of his sword; his pen shall work all this slaughter. He writes a challenge to Samaria, and therein to the guardians of the sons of Ahab, daring them, out of the confidence in their defenced city, in their chariots and horses, in their associates and arms, to set up the best of their master's sons on his father's throne, and to fight for his succession.

All the governors of Ahab's children conspire in one common fear. No doubt there wanted not in that numerous brood of kings some great spirits, that, if at least they attained to the notice of this design, longed for a revenge, and suggested counsels of resolution to their cowardly guardians: "Shall an audacious usurper run thus away with the crown of Israel? shall the blood of Jezebel be thus traitorously spilt, thus wilfully forgotten? O Israelites, can you be so base as to be ruled by my father's servant? Where are the merits of Ahab and Jehoram? what is become of the loyal courage of Israel? Doubtless ye shall not want able seconds to your valour. Do ye think the royal and potent alliances of our mother Jezebel, and the remaining heirs of Judah, can draw back their hands from your aid? will they endure to swallow so cruel an indignity? Stir up your astonished fortitude, O ye nobles of Israel! Redeem your bleeding honour! Revenge this treacherous conspirator, and establish the right of the undoubted heirs of your sovereign." But as warm clothes to a dead man, so are the motions of valour to a fearful heart: *Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?*

Fear affrights itself rather than it will want bugs of terror. It is true, two kings fell before Jehu, but two kings unarmed, unguarded. Had not the surprisal of Jehu taken advantage of the unsuspicious nakedness of these two princes, his victory had not been thus successful, thus easy. Half one of those two kings, upon advertisement and preparation, had abated the fury of that hot leader.

It is the fashion of fear to represent unto us always the worst in every event, not looking at the inequality of the advantages, but the misery of the success; as, contrarily, it is the guise of faith and valour by the good issue of one enterprise to raise up the heart to an expectation and assurance of more.

These men's hearts are dead with their kings; neither dare entertain the hope of a safe and prosperous resistance, but basely return, *We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou that which is good in thine eyes.*

Well may Jehu think, "These men which are thus disloyal to their charge cannot be faithful to me. It is their fear that draws them to this observation. Were they not cowards, they would not be traitors to their princes, subjects to me. I may use their hands, but I will not trust them. It is a thankless obedience that is grounded upon fear. There can be no true fidelity without love and reverence." Neither is it other betwixt God and us. If out of a dread of hell we be officious, who shall thank us for these respects to ourselves?

As one that had tasted already the sweetness of a resolute expedition, Jehu writes back instantly, *If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel to-morrow this time.* Valiant Jehu was so well acquainted with the nature of fear, that he well knew this passion once grown desperate would be ready to swallow all conditions: so far therefore doth his wisdom improve it, as to make these peers his executioners; who presently upon the receipt of his charge turn cruel, and by a joint consent fetch off the seventy heads of those princes whom they undertook to guard, whom they had flattered with the hopes of greater honour.

No doubt but amongst so many sons of Ahab some had so demeaned themselves that they had won zealous professions of love from their guardians. Except perhaps death stole upon them in sleep, what tears, what entreaties, what conjurations must here

needs have been! "What have we done, O ye peers of Israel, that might deserve this bloody measure? We are the sons of Ahab, therefore have ye hitherto professed to observe us. What change is this? why should that which hath hitherto kept you loyal now make you cruel? Is this the reward of the long peaceable government of our father? Are these the trophies of Ahab's victories against Benhadad, Jehoram's against Hazael? If we may not reign, yet at least let us live; or if we must die, why will your hands be imbrued in that blood which ye had wont to term royal and sacred? why will ye of tutors turn murderers?"

All pleas are in vain to them that are deafened with their own fears. Perhaps these expostulations might have fetched some dews of pity from the eyes and kisses from the lips of these unfaithful tutors, but cannot prevent the stroke of death. These crocodiles weep upon those whom they must kill; and if their own sons had been in the place of Ahab's, doubtless they had been sacrificed to the will of an usurper, to the parents' safety.

It is ill relying upon timorous natures; upon every occasion those crazy reeds will break, and run into our hands.

How worthy were Ahab and Jezebel of such friends! They had been ever false to God; how should men be true to them? They had sold themselves to work wickedness, and now they are requited with a mercenary fidelity: for a few lines have these men sold all the heads of Ahab's posterity. Could ever the policy of Jezebel have reached so far as to suspect the possibility of the extirpation of so ample an issue in one night by the hands of her trustiest subjects?

Now she that by her letter sent to the elders of Jezreel shed the blood of Naboth and his sons hath the blood of all her sons shed by a letter sent from Jezreel to the elders of Samaria. At last, God will be sure to come out of the debt of wicked sinners, and will pay them with that coin which is both most proper and least looked for.

Early in the morning, in that gate of Jezreel where Ahab had passed many an unjust sentence, is presented unto Jehu the fearful pledge of his sovereignty, seventy ghastly heads of the sons of Ahab.

Some carnal eye that had seen so many young and smooth faces besmeared with blood would have melted into compassion, bemoaning their harmless age, their untimely end. It is not for the justice of God to stand at the bar of our corrupted judg-

ment. Except we include some grandchildren of Ahab within this number, none of these died before they were seasoned with horrible idolatry; or if they had, they were in the loins of Ahab when he sold himself to work wickedness; and now it is just with God, to punish Ahab's wickedness in this fruit of his loins. The holy severity of God in the revenge of sin sometimes goes so far, that our ignorance is ready to mistake it for cruelty.

The wonder and horror of those two heaps hath easily drawn together the people of Jezreel. Jehu meets them in that seat of public judgment; and finding much amazedness and passionate confusion in their faces, he clears them, and sends them to the true original of these sudden and astonishing massacres. However his own conspiracy and the cowardly treachery of the princes of Israel had been (not without their heinous sin) the visible means of this judgment, yet he directs their eyes to a higher authority, the just decree of the Almighty, manifested by his servant Elijah; who even by the willing sins of men can most wisely, most hostilely, fetch about his most righteous and blessed purposes. If the peers of Samaria out of a base fear, if Jehu out of an ambition of reigning, shed the foul blood of Ahab's posterity, the sin is their own; but, in the mean time, the act is no other than what the infinite justice of God would justly work by their misintentions.

Let these Israelites but look up from earth to heaven, these tragical changes cannot trouble them. Thither Jehu sends them; wiping off the envy of all this blood by the warrant of the divine preordination; in obedience whereunto, he sends after these heirs of Ahab all his kinsfolks, favourites, priests, that remained in Jezreel.

And now, having cleared these coasts, he hastes to Samaria. Whom should he meet with in the way but the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah? They are going to visit their cousins, the sons of Ahab. This young troop was thinking of nothing but jollity and courtly entertainment, when they meet with death. So suddenly, so secretly had Jehu despatched these bold executions, that these princes could imagine no cause of suspicion. How could they think it might be dangerous to be known for the brethren of Ahaziah, or friends to the brethren of Jehoram? The just providence of the Almighty hath brought all this covey under one net. Jehu thinks it not safe to let go so many avengers of Ahaziah's blood, so many co-rivals of his sovereignty.

The unhappy affinity of Jehoshaphat with Ahab is no less guilty of this slaughter than Jehu's ambition; this match, by the inoculation of one bud, hath tainted all the sap of the house of Judah. The two-and-forty brethren of Ahaziah are therefore sent after the seventy sons of Ahab, that they may overtake them in death whom they came to visit. God will much less brook idolatry from the loins of a Jehoshaphat. Our entireness with wicked men feoffs us both in their sins and judgments.

Doubtless many Israelites that were devoted to the family and allies of Ahab looked (what they durst) awry at this common effusion of royal blood; yet in the worst of the depravedness of Israel, there were some which both drooped under the deplored idolatry of the times, and congratulated to Jehu this severe vindication of God's inheritance.

Amongst the rest, Jonadab the son of Rechab was most eminent. That man was by descent derived from Jethro; a Midianite by nation, but incorporated into Israel; a man whose piety and strict conversation did both teach and shame those twelve tribes to which he was joined. He was the author of an austere rule of civility to his posterity, to whom he debarred the use of wine, cities, possessions. This old and rough friend of Jehu (out of his moving habitations) meets him, and applauds his success. He that allowed not wine to his seed allows the blood of Ahab's seed poured out by the hand of Jehu: he that shunned the city is carried in Jehu's chariot to the palace of Samaria.

How easily might Jehu have been deceived! Many a one professes uprightness who yet is all guile. Jonadab's carriage hath been such that his word merits trust. It is a blessing upon the plain-hearted that they can be believed. Honest Jonadab is admitted to the honour of Jehu's seat, and called, instead of many, to witness the zeal of the new anointed king of Israel.

While Jehu had to do with kings, his cunning and his courage held equal pace together; but now that he is to deal with idolatrous priests, his will goes alone, and prevails. He calls the people together, and, dissembling his intentions, says, *Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live.*

What a dead paleness was there now in the faces of those few truehearted Israelites that looked for an happy restoration of the

religion of God! how could they choose but think, "Alas, how are we fallen from our hopes! is this the change we looked for? was it only ambition that hath set this edge upon the sword of Jehu? It was not the person of Ahab that we disliked, but the sins: if those must still succeed, what have we gained? Woe be to us if only the author of our misery be changed, not the condition, not the cause of our misery!"

On the other side, what insultations and triumphs sounded every where of the joyful Baalites! what glorying of the truth of their profession, because of the success! what scorns of their dejected opposites! what exprobrations of the disappointed hopes and predictions of their adverse prophets! what promises to themselves of a perpetuity to Baalism! How did the dispersed priests of Baal now flock together, and applaud each other's happiness, and magnify the devotions of their new sovereign! Never had that idol so glorious a day as this for the pomp of his service; before, he was adored singly in corners; now, solemn sacrifices shall be offered to him by all his clients in the great temple of the mother city of Israel.

I can commend the zeal of Jehu, I cannot commend the fraud of Jehu: we may come to our end even by crooked ways. He that bade him to smite for him did not bid him to lie for him. Falsehood, though it be but tentative, is neither needed nor approved by the God of truth: if policy have allowed officious untruths, religion never.

By this device the house of Baal is well furnished, well filled. Not one of his Chemarim either might or would be absent, not one of those which were present might be unrobed. False gods have ever affected to imitate the true. Even Baal hath temples, altars, priests, vestments. All religions have allotted peculiar habits to their highest devotions. Those vestments, which they miscalled sacred, are brought forth, and put on for the glory of this service.

Jehu and Jonadab are first careful that this separation be exact. They search and see that no servant of the Lord be crept into that throng. What should a religious Israelite do in the temple of Baal? were any such there, he had deserved their smart who would partake with their worship; but if curiosity should have drawn any thither, the mercy of Jehu seeks his rescue. How much more favourable is the God of mercies in not taking advantage of our infirmities!

Well might this search have bred suspicion, were it not that in all those idolatrous sacrifices the first care was to avoid the profane. Even Baal would admit no mixture; how should the true God abide it?

Nothing wanted now but the sacrifice; no doubt, whole herds and flocks were ready for a pretence of some royal hecatombs, whereof some had now already smoked on their altars.

O Jehu, what means this dilation? If thou abhorrest Baal, why didst thou give way to this last sacrifice? why didst thou not cut off these idolaters before this upshot of their wickedness? was it that thou mightest be sure of their guiltiness? was it that their number, together with their sin, might be complete?

What acclamations were here to Baal; what joy in the freedom of their revived worship! when all on the sudden those that had sacrificed are sacrificed. The soldiers of Jehu, by his appointment, rush in with their swords drawn, and turn the temple into a slaughterhouse.

How is the tune now changed! what shrieking was here! what outcries! what running from one sword to the edge of another! what scrambling up the walls and pillars! what climbing into the windows! what vain endeavours to escape that death which would not be shunned! whether running, or kneeling, or prostrate, they must die.

The first part of the sacrifice was Baal's, the latter is God's. The blood of beasts was offered in the one, of men in the other: the shedding of this was so much more acceptable to God by how much these men were more beasts than those they sacrificed.

O happy obedience! God was pleased with a sacrifice from the house of Baal; the idolaters are slain; the idols burnt; the house of Baal turned to a draught; (though even thus, less unclean, less noisome, than in the former perfumes;) and, in one word, Baal is destroyed out of Israel.

Who that had seen all this zeal for God would not have said, "Jehu is a true Israelite?" Yet he that rooted out Ahab would not be rid of Jeroboam; he that destroyed Baal maintained the two calves of Dan and Bethel. That idolatry was of a lower rank, as being a misworship of the true God; whereas the other was a worship of the false. Even the easier of both is heinous, and shall rob Jehu of the praise of his uprightness. A false heart may laudably quit itself of some one gross sin, and in the mean time hug some lesser evil that may condemn it; as a man recovered of

a fever may die of jaundice or a dropsy. We lose the thank of all if we wilfully fault in one.

It is an entire goodness that God cares for. Perhaps, such is the bounty of our God, a partial obedience may be rewarded with a temporal blessing; as Jehu's severity to Ahab shall carry the crown to his seed for four generations: but we can never have any comfortable assurance of an eternal retribution if our hearts and ways be not perfect with God. Woe be to us, O God, if we be not all thine! We cannot but everlastingly depart from thee if we depart not from every sin. Thou hast purged our hearts from the Baal of our gross idolatries, O clear us from the golden calves of our petty corruptions also, that thou mayest take pleasure in our uprightness, and we may reap the sweet comforts of thy glorious remuneration.

ATHALIAH AND JOASH.

2 Kings xi, xii; 2 Chronicles xxii, xxiii, xxiv.

O the woful ruins of the house of good Jehoshaphat! Jehu hath slain two-and-forty of his issue, Athaliah hopes to root out the rest. This daughter of Ahab was not like to be other than fatal to that holy line. One drop of that wicked blood was enough both to impure and spill all the rest which affinity had mixed with it.

It is not unlike that Ahaziah, betaking himself to the society of Jehoram's wars, committed the sway of his sceptre to his mother Athaliah. The daughter of Jezebel cannot but be plotting. When she hears of the death of Ahaziah and his brethren, inflicted by the heavy hand of Jehu, she straight casts for the kingdom of Judah. The true heirs are infants; their minority gives her both colour of rule and opportunity of an easy extirpation. Perhaps her ambition was not more guilty than her zeal of Baalism; she saw Jehu, out of a detestation of idolatry, trampling on the blood of Jehoram, Jezebel, Ahaziah, the sons of Ahab, the brethren of Ahaziah, the priests and prophets of Baal, and, in one word, triumphing in the destruction both of Ahab and his gods, out of Israel; and now she thinks, "Why should not I destroy Jehoshaphat and his God out of Judah?"

Who ever saw an idolater that was not cruel? Athaliah must needs let out some of her own blood out of the throat of

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Ahaziah's sons; yet she spares not to shed it out of a thirst of sovereignty.

O God, how worthy of wonder are thy just and merciful dispensations, in that thou sufferest the seed of good Jehoshaphat to be destroyed by her hand in whose affinity he offended, and yet savest one branch of this stock of Jehoshaphat for the sake of so faithful a progenitor!

Wicked Athaliah, couldst thou think God would so far forget his servant David, though no other of those loins had seconded his virtues, as to suffer all his seed to be rooted out of the earth? This vengeance was for thy father Ahab. The man according to God's own heart shall have a lineal heir to succeed in his throne when thou and thy father's house shall have vanished into forgetfulness.

For this purpose hath the wise providence of God ordained a Jehosheba, and matched her in the priestly tribe. Such reverence did Jehoram king of Judah, though degenerated into the idolatry of his father-in-law Ahab, bear to this sacred function, that he marries his daughter to Jehoiada the priest. Even princesses did not then scorn the bed of those that served at God's altar. Why should the Gospel pour contempt upon that which the Law honoured?

That good lady had too much of Jehoshaphat in her to suffer the utter extirpation of that royal seed. She could not, doubtless, without the extreme danger of her own life, save the life of her nephew Joash. With what a loving boldness doth she adventure to steal him from amongst those bleeding carcasses in the chamber of death! Her match gave her opportunity to effect that which both nature and religion moved her to attempt. Neither know I whether more to wonder at the cunning of the device, or the courage of the enterprise, or the secrecy of the concealment, or the happiness of the success.

Certainly, Athaliah was too cruelly careful to forget this so late born son of Ahaziah: of all the rest, his age would not suffer him to be out of her eye: in all likelihood therefore she must needs have missed so noted a corpse had there not been a substitution of some other dead child in his room. In that age the favour is not so distinguishable, especially of a dead face. Without some pious deceit, this work could never have been effected. Else, had the child been secretly subduced, and missed by his bloody grandmother, her perpetual jealousy had both expected a surviving heir,

and continued a curious and unavoidable search; both which were now shunned at once, while Athaliah reckons him for dead whom Jehosheba hath preserved. Mischief sometimes fails of those appointments wherein it thinks to have made the surest work. God laughs in heaven at the plots of tyrants, and befools them in their deepest projects. He had said to David, *Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy seat:* in vain shall earth and hell conspire to frustrate it.

Six years hath Joash and his nurse been hid in a close cell of the temple. Those rooms were destined only to the holy tribe, yet now rejoice to harbour such a guest. The rigour of the ordinary law must yield to cases of so important necessity.

All this could not possibly be done and continued without the privity of many faithful priests and Levites, who were as careful to keep this counsel as hopeful of the issue of it. It is not hard for many honest hearts to agree in a religious secrecy: needs must those lips be shut which God hath sealed up.

Judah had not been used to such a yoke. Long had it groaned under the tyranny, not of a woman only, but of an idolatrous Sidonian: if any of that sex might have claimed that sceptre, none had so much right to it as Jehosheba herself; but good Jehoiada the priest, who had rather be a loyal guardian to the king than a husband to a queen, now finds time to set on foot the just title of Joash, and to put him into the misusurped throne of his father Ahaziah.

In the seventh year, therefore, he sends for the captains and the guard; and having sworn them secrecy, by undoubted witnesses makes faith unto them of the truth of their native prince, thus happily rescued from the bloody knife of his merciless grandmother; marshals the great business of his inauguration; gives every one his charge; sets every one his station; and so disposes of his holy forces, as was most needful for the safety of the king, the revenge of the usurper, the prevention of tumults, the establishment of the crown upon the owner's head in peace and joy.

There was none of all these agents who did not hold the business to be his own. Every true subject of Judah was feelingly interested in this service; neither was there any of them who was not secretly heartburned all this while with the hateful government of this idolatrous tyranness: and now this inward fire is glad to find a vent. How gladly do they address themselves to this welcome employment!

The greatest part of this secret band were Levites; who might therefore both meet together with least suspicion, and be more securely trusted by Jehoiada, under whom they served. Even that holy priest of God, instead of teaching the law, sets the guard, orders the captains, ranges the troops of Judah, and, instead of a censer, brings forth the spears and shields of David. The temple is for the present a field or an artillery-yard, and the ephods are turned into harness. That house, in the rearing whereof not the noise of a hammer might be heard, now admits of the clashing of armour and the secret murmurs of some military achievement. No circumstances, either of place or calling, are so punctual as that public necessity may not dispense with their alteration.

All things are now ready for this solemnity. Each man rejoices to fix upon his own footing, and longs to see the face of their long concealed sovereign; and vows his blood to the vindication of the common liberty, to the punishment of a cruel intruder. Now Jehoiada brings forth unto them the king's son, and presents him to the peers and people. Hardly can the multitude contain itself from shouting out too soon. One sees in his countenance the features of his father Ahaziah; another, of his grandfather Jehoram; a third professes to discern in him some lines and fashion of his great grandfather Jehoshaphat; all find in his face the natural impressions of majesty, and read in it the hopes, yea, the prophecies, of their future happiness.

Not with more joy than speed doth Jehoiada accomplish all the rites of the coronation. Before that young king could know what was done to him, he is anointed, crowned, presented with the book of the law.

Those ceremonies were instructive; and, no doubt, Jehoiada failed not to comment upon them, in due time, to that royal pupil.

The oil wherewith he was anointed signified his designation to that high service, and those endowments from heaven that might enable him to so great a function.

The crown wherewith he was adorned signified that glory and majesty which should both encourage and attend his princely cares.

The book of the testimony signified the divine rules and directions, whereto he must frame his heart and actions, in the wielding of that crown, in the improvement of that oil.

These three, the oil, the crown, the testimony, that is, inward

powers, outward magnificence, true piety and justice, make up a perfect prince. None of these may be wanting. If there be not a due calling of God, and abilities meet for that greatness, the oil faileth: if there be not a majestic grace and royalty that may command reverence, the crown is missing: if there be not a careful respect to the law of God, as the absolute guide of all counsels and determinations, the testimony is neglected: all of them concurring make both king and people happy.

Now it is time for the people to clap their hands, and by their loud acclamations to witness their joy, which must needs break forth with so much more force, by how much it was longer upon fears and policy suppressed.

The court and temple were near together. However it was with Athaliah and the late revolted princes of Judah, according to the common word, the nearer to the church the farther from God; their religious predecessors held it the greatest commodity of their house that it neighboured upon the house of God.

From her palace might Athaliah easily hear the joyful shouts of the multitude, the loud noise of the trumpets; and, as astonished with the new tumult of public gratulations, she comes running into the temple. Never had her foot trod upon that holy pavement till now that she came to fetch a just revenge from that God whose worship she had contemned.

It fell out well that her sudden amazedness called her forth without the attendance of any strong guard, whose sidetaking might have made that quarrel mutually bloody.

She soon hears and sees what she likes not. Her ear meets with, *God save the king!* her eye meets with the unlooked-for heir of the kingdom, sitting on his throne crowned and robed in the royal fashion, guarded with the captains and soldiers, proclaimed by the trumpeters, acclaimed and applauded by the people.

Who can say whether this sight drave her more near to phrensy or death? How could it be otherwise, when those great spirits of hers, that had been long used to an uncontrolled sovereignty, find themselves so unexpectedly suppressed?

She now rends her clothes, and cries, *Treason, treason,* as if that voice of hers could still command all hearts, all hands; as if one breath of hers were powerful enough to blow away all these new designs.

O Athaliah, to whom dost thou complain thyself? They are thy just executioners wherewith thou art encompassed? If it be

treason to set up the true heir of Ahaziah, thou appealest to thy traitors. The treason was thine, theirs is justice. The time is now come of thy reckonings for all the royal blood of Judah which thine ambition shed. Wonder rather at the patience of this long forbearance than the rigour of this execution.

There needs no formal seat of justice in so apparent offence. Jehoiada passes the sentence of death upon her: *Have her forth of the ranges: let her not be slain in the house of the Lord: and him that followeth her kill with the sword.*

Had not this usurpation been palpable, Jehoiada would not have presumed to intermeddle; now, being both the priest of God and uncle and protector to the lawful king, he doth that out of the necessity of the state which his infant sovereign, if he could have been capable of those thoughts, would have desired.

Violent hands are laid upon Athaliah, whom no doubt a proud and furious disdain of so quick a charge and of so rough an usage made miserably impatient. Now she frowns, and calls, and shrieks, and commands, and threatens, and reviles, and entreats in vain; and dies with as much ill-will from herself as she lived with the ill-will of her repining subjects.

I see not any one man of all her late flatterers that follows her either for pity or rescue. Every man willingly gives her up to justice; not one sword is drawn in her defence; not one eye laments her. Such is the issue of a tyrannical misgovernment. That which is obeyed not without secret hate is lost not without public joy.

How like is Athaliah to her mother Jezebel, as in conditions and carriage, so even in death; both killed violently, both killed under their own walls, both slain with treason in their mouths, both slain in the entrance of a changed government; one trod on by the horses, the other slain in the horse gate! Both paid their own blood for the innocent blood of others.

How suddenly, how easily is Judah restored to itself after so long and so fearful a depravation! The people scarce believe their own eyes for the wonder of this happy change; neither know I whether they be more joyed in the sight of their new king thus strangely preserved, or in the sight of Jehoiada that had preserved him.

No man can envy the protection of the young king unto him by whose means he lives and reigns.

That holy man cares only to improve his authority to the com-

mon good. He makes *a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people;* and after so long and dangerous a disjunction reunites them to each other. Their revived zeal bestirs itself and breaks down the temples and altars and images of Baal, and sacrifices his idolatrous priests. Shortly, both Ahab and Baal are destroyed out of Judah.

The sceptre of Judah is changed from a woman to a child, but a child trained up and tutored by Jehoiada. This minority so guided was not inferior to the mature age of many predecessors. Happy is that land the non-age of whose princes falls into holy and just hands.

Yet even these holy and just hands came short of what they might have done. The high places remained still. Those altars were erected to the true God, but in a wrong place. It is a marvel if there be not some blemishes found in the best government. I doubt Jehoiada shall once buy it dear that he did not his utmost.

But for the main, all was well with Judah in all the days of Jehoiada; even after that Joash was grown past his pupilage. He that was the tutor to his infancy was the counsellor of his ripe age, and was equally happy in both.

How pleasing was it to that good high priest to be commanded by that charge of his in the business of God! The young king gives order to the priests for the collection of large sums to the repairing of the breaches of God's house. It becomes him well to take care of that which was the nursery of his infancy. And now, after three and twenty years, he expostulates with his late guardian, Jehoiada, and the rest of his court, *Why repair ye not the breaches?*

O gracious and happy vicissitude! Jehoiada the priest had ruled the infancy of king Joash in matters of state, and now Joash the king commands aged Jehoiada the priest in matter of devotion. In the affairs of God the action is the priest's, the oversight and coaction is the prince's: by the careful endeavour of both, God's house is repaired, his service flourisheth.

But, alas! that it may too well appear that the ground of this devotion was not altogether inward, no sooner doth the life of Jehoiada cease, than the devotion of Joash begins to languish, and, after some languor, dies. The benefit of a truly religious prelate or statesman is not known till his loss.

Now some idolatrous peers of Judah have soon miscarried the king from the house of the Lord God of their fathers to serve

groves and idols. Yea, whither go we wretched men, if we be left by our Maker? King Joash is turned, not idolater only, but persecutor; yea, which is yet more horrible to consider, persecutor of the son of that Jehoiada to whom he owes his own life. Zechariah his cousin-german, his foster-brother, the holy issue of those parents by whom Josiah lives and reigns, for the conscionable rebuke of the idolatry of prince and people, is unjustly and cruelly murdered by that unthankful hand! How possible is it for fair and saint-like beginnings to shut up in monstrous impieties! *Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

When did God ever put up so foul ingratitude to himself, to his servants? O Joash, what eyes can pity the fearful destruction of thee and thy Judah? If ye have forgotten the kindness of Jehoiada, your unkindness to Jehoiada shall not be forgotten. A small army of Syrians came up against Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people, and sent all the spoil of them to Damascus. Now Hazael revenges this quarrel of God and his anointed, and plagues that people which made themselves unworthy to be the Lord's inheritance.

And what becomes of Joash? he is *left in great diseases,* when *his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada, and slew him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him not in the sepulchre of the kings.*

Dying Zechariah had said, in the bitterness of his departing soul, *The Lord look upon it, and require it.* I confess, I had rather to have heard him say, "The Lord pass it over, and remit it;" so said Stephen; such difference there is between a martyr of the Law and of the Gospel: although I will hope the zeal of justice, not the uncharitable heat of revenge, drew forth this word.

God hears it, and now gives an account of his notice. Thus doth the Lord require the blood of Jehoiada's son, even by the like unthankful hand of the obliged servants of Joash. He that was guilty of abominable idolatry, yet, as if God meant to wave that challenge, is called to reckoning for his cruel unthankfulness to Jehoiada. This crime shall make him odious alive, and shall abandon him dead from the sepulchre of his fathers; as if this last royalty were too good for him who had forgotten the law of humanity.

Some vices are such as nature smiles upon, though frowned at by divine justice; others are such as even nature itself abhors;

such is this of ingratitude, which therefore carries so much more detestation from God, as it is more odious even to them that have blotted out the image of God.

JOASH, WITH ELISHA DYING.—2 Kings xiii.

The two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, however divided both in government and affection, yet loved to interchange the names of their kings.

Even Israel also had their Joash, no better than that of Judah. He was not more the father of a later Jeroboam, than, in respect of misworship, he was the son of that first Jeroboam *who made Israel to sin.* Those calves of Dan and Bethel, out of a politic misdevotion, besotted all the succession of the ten usurped tribes; yet even this idolatrous king of Israel comes down to visit the sick bed of Elisha, and weeps upon his face.

That holy prophet was never any flatterer of princes, neither spared he invectives against their most plausible sins; yet king Joash, that was beaten by his reproofs, washes that face with the tears of love and sorrow which had often frowned upon his wickedness.

How much difference there was betwixt the Joash of Israel and the Joash of Judah! That of Judah, having been preserved and nurtured by Jehoiada the priest, after all professions of dearness, shuts up in the unkind murder of his son; and that merely for the just reproof of his own idolatry: this of Israel, having been estranged from the prophet Elisha, and sharply rebuked for the like offence, makes love to his dying reprover, and bedews his pale face with his tears. Both were bad enough; but this of Israel was, however vicious, yet good-natured: that of Judah added to his wickedness an ill disposition, a dogged humour. There are varieties even of evil men: some are worse at the root, others at the branch; some more civilly harmless, others fouler in morality. According to the exercise of the restraining grace, natural men do either rise or fall in their ill.

The longest day must have his evening. Good Elisha, that had lived some ninety years a wonder of prophets, and had outworn many successions in the thrones of Israel and Judah, is now cast upon the bed of his sickness, yea, of his death. That very age might seem a disease; which yet is seconded with a languishing

distemper. It is not in the power of any holiness to privilege us from infirmity of body, from final dissolution. He that stretched himself upon his bed over the dead carcass of the Shunamite's son, and revived it, must now stretch out his own limbs upon his sick bed, and die. He saw his master Elijah rapt up suddenly from the earth, and fetched by a fiery chariot from this vale of mortality; himself must leisurely wait for his last pangs in a lingering passage to the same glory.

There is not one way appointed to us by the Divine Providence unto one common blessedness. One hath more pain, another hath more speed; violence snatcheth away one; another, by an insensible pace, draws every day nearer to his term. The wisdom and goodness of God magnifies itself in both. Happy is he, that, after due preparation, is passed through the gates of death ere he be aware. Happy is he, that, by the holy use of long sickness, is taught to see the gates of death afar off, and addressed for a resolute passage; the one dies like Elijah, the other like Elisha; both blessedly.

The time was when a great king sent to Elisha to know if he should recover; now the king of Israel, as knowing that Elisha shall not recover (so had his consumption spent him), comes to visit the dying prophet; and when his tears would give him leave, breaks forth into a passionate exclamation, *O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*

Yet the calves of Dan and Bethel have left some goodness in Joash. As the best man hath something in him worthy of reproof, so the faultiest hath something commendable. Had not the Spirit of God himself told us that Joash did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, we had admired this piety, this reverent respect to the prophet. The holiest man could not have said more. It is possible for the clients of a false worship to honour, out of another regard, the professors of truth. From the hand of Elisha had Jehu, the grandfather of Joash, received his unction to the kingdom; this favour might not be forgotten.

Visitation of the sick is a duty required both by the law of humanity and of religion; bodily infirmity is sad and comfortless; and therefore needs the presence and counsel of friends to relieve it: although, when we draw the curtains of those that are eminently gracious, we do rather fetch with Joash than bring a blessing.

How sensible should we be of the loss of holy men when a Joash

spends his tears upon Elisha! If we be more affected with the foregoing of a natural friend or kinsman than of a noted and useful prophet, it argues more love to ourselves than to the Church of God, than to God himself.

What use there was of chariots and horsemen in those wars of the ancient, all histories can tell us; all the strength of the battle stood in these; there could be neither defence nor offence but by them. Such was Elisha unto Israel. The greatest safeguard to any nation is the sanctity and faithfulness of their prophets; without which the church and state lies open to utter desolation.

The same words that Elisha said of his master Elijah, when he saw him taken up from the earth, doth Joash now speak of Elisha near his dissolution: *O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*

The words were good, the tears were pious; but where are the actions? O Joash, if the prophet were thy father, where was thy filial obedience? He cried down thy calves, thou upheldest them; he counselled thee to good, thou didst evil in the sight of the Lord. If the prophet were the chariots and horsemen of Israel, why didst thou fight against his holy doctrine? if thou weepest for his loss, why didst thou not weep for those sins of thine that procured it? Had thine hand answered thy tongue, Israel had been happy in Elisha; Elisha had been happy in Israel and thee. Words are no good trial of profession; the worst men may speak well; actions have only the power to descry hypocrites.

Yet even a Joash, thus complying, shall not go away unblessed. This outward kindness shall receive an outward retribution; these few drops of warm water shed upon the face of a prophet shall not lose their reward.

The Spirit of Prophecy forsakes not the deathbed of Elisha. He calls for bow and arrows, and puts them into the hand of Joash; and putting his hands upon the king's hand, he bids to shoot eastward, and while the shaft flies and lights, he says, *The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou hast consumed them.*

If the weak and withered hand of the prophet had not been upon the youthful and vigorous hand of the king, this bow had been drawn in vain. The strength was from the hand of the king; the blessing from the hand of the prophet. He whose real parable hath made the earth to be Syria; the arrow, revenge; the archer, Joash; hath obtained for his last boon from God to Israel,

that this archer shall shoot this arrow of revenge into the heart of Syria, and wound it to death. When then the hand of the king and of the prophet draws together, there cannot choose but success must follow.

How readily doth Elisha now make good the words of Joash! how truly is he the chariots and horsemen of Israel! Israel had not fought without him, much less had been victorious. If theirs be the endeavour, the success is his. Even the dying prophet puts life and speed into the forces of Israel, and while he is digging his own grave is raising trophies to God's people.

He had received kindness from the Syrians: amongst them was he harboured in the dearth, and from some of their nobles was presented with rich gifts; but their enmity to Israel drowns all his private respects; he cannot but profess hostility to the public enemies of the Church.

Neither can he content himself with a single prediction of their ruin. He bids Joash to take the arrows and smite upon the ground. He sets no number of those strokes; as supposing the frequence of those blows, which Joash might well, upon his former parabolical act, understand to be significant.

The slack hand of the king smites but thrice; so apt we are to be wanting to ourselves, so coldly do we execute the commands of God. The sick prophet is not more grieved than angry at this dull negligence. Doubtless God had revealed to him, for his last gratification, that, upon his fervent prayers, so oft as Joash should voluntarily after his general charge smite the earth, so oft should Israel smite Syria.

Elisha's zeal doth not languish with his body. With a fatherly authority he chides him who had styled him *father*; not fearing to spend some of his last wind in a mild reproof: *Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then thou hadst smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.* Not that the unchangeable decree of the Almighty meant to suspend itself upon the uncertain issue of Joash's will; but he that puts this word into the mouth of his prophet puts this motion into the hand of the king, which did not more willingly stay than necessarily obey the providence whereby it was stirred. Even while we have our freest choice we fall upon those actions and circumstances whereby the just and holy will of our God is brought about. Our very neglects, our ignorances, shall fulful his eternal counsels.

Elisha dies, and is buried. His miracles do not cease with his life. Who can marvel that his living prayers raised the son of the Shunamite when his dead bones raise the carcass that touched them?

God will be free in his works. He that must die himself yet shall revive another. The same power might have continued life to him that gave it by his bones.

Israel shall well see that he lives by whose virtue Elisha was both in life and death miraculous. While the prophet was alive, the impetration might seem to be his, though the power were God's; now that he is dead, the bones can challenge nothing, but send the wandering Israelites to that Almighty agent, to whom it is all one to work by the quick or dead.

Were not the men of Israel more dead than the carcass thus buried, how could they choose but see in this revived corpse an emblem of their own condition? how could they choose but think, "If we adhere to the God of Elisha, he shall raise our decayed estates, and restore our nation to the former glory?"

The Sadducees had as yet no being in Israel. With what face could that heresy ever after look into the world, when, before the birth of it, it was so palpably convinced with an example of the resurrection?

Intermission of time and degrees of corruption add nothing to the impossibility of our rising. The body that is once cold in death hath no more aptitude to a reanimation than that which is mouldered into dust. Only the divine power of the Maker must restore either, can restore both.

When we are dead and buried in the grave of our sin, it is only the touch of God's prophets, applying unto us the death and resurrection of the Son of God, that can put new life into us. No less true, though spiritual, is the miracle of our raising up from an estate of inward corruption to a life of grace.

Yet all this prevails not with Israel. No bones of Elisha could raise them from their wicked idolatry; and, notwithstanding their gross sins, Joash their king prospers. Whether it were for the sake of Jehu, whose grandchild he was, or for the sake of Elisha, whose face he wept upon, his hand is notably successful; not only against the son of Hazael king of Syria, whom he beats out of the cities of Israel, but against Amaziah king of Judah, whom he took prisoner, beating down the very walls of Jerusalem, and returning

laden with the sacred and rich spoil, both of the temple and court, to his Samaria.

O the depth of the divine justice and wisdom in these outward administrations! The best cause, the best man, doth not ever fare best. Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; Joash, evil: Amaziah follows David, though not with equal paces; Joash follows Jeroboam: yet is Amaziah shamefully foiled by Joash. Whether God yet meant to visit upon this king of Judah the still odious unthankfulness of his father to Jehoiada; or to plague Judah for their share in the blood of Zechariah, and their late revolt to idolatry; or whether Amaziah's too much confidence in his own strength, which moved his bold challenge to Joash, were thought fit to be thus taken down; or whatever other secret ground of God's judgment there might be, it is not for our presumption to inquire. Whoso by the event shall judge of love or hatred shall be sure to run upon that woe which belongs to them that call good evil and evil good.

What a savage piece of justice it is to put the right, whether of inheritance or honour, to the decision of the sword, when it is no news for the better to miscarry by the hand of the worse!

The race is not to the swift, the battle is not to the strong; no not to the good. Perhaps God will correct his own by a foil; perhaps he will plague his enemy by a victory. They are only our spiritual combats wherein our faithful courage is sure of a crown.

UZZIAH LEPROUS.

2 Kings xiv, xv; 2 Chronicles xxvi.

Even the throne of David passed many changes of good and evil. Good Jehoshaphat was followed with three successions of wicked princes, and those three were again succeeded with three others godly and virtuous.

Amaziah for a long time shone fair, but at the last shut up in a cloud. The gods of the Edomites marred him. His rebellion against God stirred up his people's rebellion against him.

The same hands that slew him crowned his son Uzziah; so as the young king might imagine it was not their spite that drew violence upon his father, but his own wickedness.

Both early did this prince reign and late. He began at sixteen, and sat fifty-two years in the throne of Judah. They that mutinied in the declining age of Amaziah the father are obsequious to the childhood of the son, as if they professed to adore sovereignty while they hated lewdness. The unchanged government of good princes is the happiness no less of the subjects than of themselves. The hand knows best to guide those reins to which it hath been inured, and even mean hackneys go on cheerfully in their wonted road. Custom, as it makes evils more supportable, so, where it meets with constant minds, makes good things more pleasing and beneficial.

The wise and holy prophet Zechariah was an happy tutor to the minority of king Uzziah. That vessel can hardly miscarry where a skilful steersman sits at the helm. The first praise of a good prince is to be judicious and just, and pious in himself; the next is, to give ear and way to them that are such. While Zechariah hath the visions of God, and Uzziah takes the counsels of Zechariah, it is hard to say whether the prophet or the king or the state be happier.

God will be in no man's debt. So long as Uzziah *sought the Lord, God made him to prosper*. Even what we do out of duty cannot want a reward. Godliness never disappointed any man's hopes, oft hath exceeded them. If Uzziah fight against the Philistines, if against the Arabians and Mehunims, according to his names, (Uzziah, Azariah,) the Strength, the Help of the Almighty is with him. The Ammonites come in with presents, and all the neighbour nations ring of the greatness, of the happiness of Uzziah. His bounty and care make Jerusalem both strong and proud of her new towers; yea, the very desert must taste of his munificence.

The outward magnificence of princes cannot stand firm unless it be built upon the foundations of providence and frugality. Uzziah had not been so great a king if he had not been so great a husband. He had his flocks in the deserts and his herds in the plains; his ploughs in the fields; his vinedressers upon the mountains and in Carmel: neither was this more out of profit than delight, *for he loved husbandry*. Who can contemn those callings for meanness which have been the pleasures of princes?

Hence was Uzziah so potent at home, so dreadful to his neighbours: his wars had better sinews than theirs. Which of his predecessors was able to maintain so settled an army, of more

than of three hundred and ten thousand trained soldiers, well furnished, well fitted for the suddenest occasion? Thrift is the strongest prop of power.

The greatness of Uzziah and the rare devices of his artificial engines for war have not more raised his fame than his heart. So is he swoln up with the admiration of his own strength and glory that he breaks again. How easy it is for the best man to dote upon himself, and to be lifted up so high as to lose the sight both of the ground whence he arises, and of the hand that advanced him! How hard it is for him that hath invented strange engines for the battering of his enemies to find out any means to beat down his own proud thoughts!

Wise [Agur] Solomon knew what he did when he prayed to be delivered from too much: *lest*, said he, *I be full, and deny thee; and say, Who is the Lord?* Upon this rock did the son of Solomon run, and split himself: his full sails of prosperity carried him into presumption and ruin. What may he not do? what may he not be? Because he found his power otherwise unlimited; overruling in the court, the cities, the fields, the deserts, the arms, and magazines; therefore he thinks he may do so in the temple too: as things royal, civil, husbandly, military passed his hands; so why should not, thinks he, sacred also? It is a dangerous indiscretion for a man not to know the bounds of his own calling. What confusion doth not follow upon this breaking of the ranks!

Upon a solemn day, king Uzziah clothes himself in pontifical robes, and in the view of that populous assembly walks up in state into the temple of God, and boldly approaching to the altar of incense offers to burn sweet odours upon it to the God of heaven. Azariah the priest is sensible of so perilous an encroachment; he therefore, attended with fourscore valiant assistants of that holy tribe, hastens after the king; and finding him with the censer in his hand ready addressed to that sinful devotion, stays him with a free and grave expostulation: "There is no place wherein I could be sorry to see thee, O king, but this where thou art; neither is there any act that we should grudge thee so much as this, which is the most sacred. Is it possible that so great an oversight should fall into such wisdom? Can a religious prince, trained up under an holy Zechariah, after so many years' zealous profession of piety, be either ignorant or regardless of those limits which God hath set to his own services?

O, what means this uncouth attempt? Consider, O dear sovereign, for God's sake, for thy soul's sake, consider where thou art, what thou doest. It is God's house wherein thou standest, not thine own. Look about thee, and see whether these vails, these tables, these pillars, these walls, these pavements, have any resemblance of earth. There is no place in all the world whence thy God hath excluded thee but only this; this he hath reserved for his own use: and canst thou think much to allow one room as proper to him who hath not grudged all the rest to thee? But if it be thy zeal of a personal service to God that hath carried thee hither, alas! how canst thou hope to please the Almighty with a forbidden sacrifice? Which of thine holy progenitors ever dared to tread where thy foot now standeth? which of them ever put forth their hand to touch this sacred altar? Thou knowest that God hath set apart and sanctified his own attendants. Wherefore serves the priesthood if this be the right of kings? Were it not for the strict prohibition of our God, it could seem no other than an honour to our profession that a king should think to dignify himself by our employment; but now, knowing the severe charge of the great King of heaven, we cannot but tremble to see that censer in thy hand. Who ever out of the holy tribe hath wielded it unrevenged? This affront is not to us, it is to the God whom we serve. In awe of that terrible Majesty, as thou wouldest avoid some exemplary judgment, O king, withdraw thyself, not without humble deprecations, from this presence, and lay down that interdicted handful with fear and trembling. Be thou ever a king, let us be priests; the sceptre is thine, let censers be ours."

What religious heart could do other than relent at so faithful and just an admonition? But how hard is it for great persons to yield they have offended! Uzziah must not be faulty. What is done rashly shall be borne out with power. He was wroth, and thus expresseth it: "What means this saucy expostulation, O ye sons of Levi? how dare ye thus malapertly control the well-meant actions of your sovereign? If ye be priests, remember that ye are subjects; or if ye will needs forget it, how easy is it for this hand to awake your memory! What such offence can it be for me to come into that house, and to touch that altar, which my royal progenitors have made, beautified, consecrated? Is the God of this place only yours? Why do ye thus ambitiously engross religion? If princes have not intermeddled with these holy

affairs, it was because they would not, not because they might not. When those laws were made for the sanctuary, there were no kings to grace these divine ceremonies, yet even then Moses was privileged. The persons of princes, if ye know not, are no less sacred than your own. It is your presumption to account the Lord's anointed profane. Contest with those whose dry and unhallowed heads are subject to your power; for me, I will not ask your leave to be devout. Look ye to your own censers, presume not to meddle with mine. In the mean time, can ye think this insolence of yours shall escape unrevenged? Can it stand with the honour of my sovereignty to be thus proudly checked by subjects? God do so to me, and more also, if ——"

While Uzziah yet speaks, God strikes. Ere the words of fury can come forth of his mouth the leprosy appears in his forehead. Leprosy was a most loathsome disease; the forehead is the most conspicuous part: had this shameful scurf broken forth upon his hand or foot or breast, it might have been hid from the eyes of men: now the forehead is smitten with this judgment, that God may proclaim to all beholders, "Thus shall it be done to the man whose arrogance hath thrust him upon a sacred charge." Public offences must have open shame.

It is a dangerous thing to put ourselves into the affairs, into the presence of God unwarranted. There cannot be a more foolish misprision than because we are great on earth, to think we may be bold with Heaven. When God's messengers cannot prevail by counsels, entreaties, threats, it is time for God to show his immediate judgments. Wilful offenders can expect nothing but a fearful revenge.

Now begins Uzziah to be confounded in himself, and shame strives with leprosy for a place in his forehead. The hand of God hath done that in an instant which all the tongues of men had attempted in vain. There needs no further solicitor of his egress; the sense of his plague sends him forth alone. And now he thinks, "Wretched man that I am, how have I angered God and undone myself! I would needs come in like a priest, and now go forth a leper. The pride of my heart made me think myself worthy the presence of a God: God's just displeasure hath now made me unworthy of the presence of men. While I affected the altar I have lost my throne. While I scornfully rejected the advice and censures of God's ministers, I am now become a spectacle of horror and deformity to my own servants. I, that would be sending up

perfumes to heaven, have made my nastiness hateful to my own senses. What do I under this sacred roof? Neither is God's house now for me nor mine own. What cell, what dungeon is close enough for me wherein to wear out the residue of mine unhappy and uncomfortable days? O God, thou art just and I am miserable."

Thus with a dejected countenance and sad heart doth Uzziah haste to retire himself, and wishes that he could be no less hid from himself than from others. How easy is it for the God of heaven to bring down the highest pitch of earthly greatness, and to humble the stubbornest pride!

Upon the leisure of second thoughts Uzziah cannot but acknowledge much favour in this correction, and confess to have escaped well. Others, he knew, had been struck dead or swallowed up quick for so presumptuous an intrusion. It is happy for him if his forehead may excuse his soul.

Uzziah ceased not to be a king when he began to be a leper. The disease of his forehead did not remove his crown. His son Jotham reigned for him, under him; and while he was not seen, yet he was obeyed. The character of sovereignty is indelible; whether by bodily infirmity or by spiritual censure. Neither is it otherwise, O God, betwixt thee and us; if we be once a royal generation unto thee, our leprosies may deform us, they shall not dethrone us. Still shall we have the right, still the possession of that glorious kingdom wherein we are invested from eternity.

AHAZ WITH HIS NEW ALTAR.

2 Kings xvi; 2 Chronicles xxviii.

After many unhappy changes of the two thrones, Ahaz succeeds Jotham in the kingdom of Judah; an ill son of a good father; not more the heir of David's seat than of Jeroboam's sin.

Though Israel play the harlot, yet who can abide that Judah should sin? It is hard not to be infected with a contagious neighbourhood. Who ever read that the kingdom of Israel was seasoned with the vicinity of the true religion of Judah? Goodness (such as our nature is) is not so apt to spread. A tainted air doth more easily affect a sound body than an wholesome air can clear the sick.

Superstition hath ever been more successful than truth. The young years of Ahaz are soon misled to a plausible misdevotion.

A man that is once fallen from truth knows not where he shall stay. From the calves of Jeroboam is Ahaz drawn to the gods of the heathen; yea, now, bulls and goats are too little for those new deities; his own flesh and blood is but dear enough: *He made his son to pass through their fire.*

Where do we find any religious Israelite thus zealous for God? Neither doth the holiness and mercy of our God require so cruel a sacrifice; neither is our dull and niggardly hand ready to gratify him with more easy obediences. O God, how gladly should we offer unto thee our souls and bodies, which we may enjoy so much the more when they are thine, since zealous pagans stick not to lose their own flesh and blood in an idol's fire?

He that hath thus shamefully cast off the God of his fathers, cannot be long without a fearful revenge. The king of Israel galls him on the one side, the king of Syria on the other. To avoid the shock of both, Ahaz doth not betake himself to the God whom he had offended, who was able to make his enemies at peace with him, but to Tiglath Pileser king of Ashur. Him doth he woo with suits, with gifts, and robs God of those presents which may endear so strong a helper. He that thought not his son too dear for an idol thinks not God's silver and gold too dear for an idolatrous abettor.

O the infinite patience of the Almighty! God gives success a while to so offensive a rivality. This Assyrian king prevails against the king of Syria, kills him, and takes his chief city, Damascus. The quarrel of the king of Judah hath enlarged the territories of his assistant beyond hope. And now, while this Assyrian victor is enjoying the possession of his new won Damascus, Ahaz goes up thither to meet him, to congratulate the victory, to add unto those triumphs which were drawn on by his solicitation.

There he sees a new-fashioned altar that pleases his eye. That old form of Solomon's, which was made by the pattern showed to Moses in the mount, is now grown stale and despicable. A model of this more exquisite frame is sent to Urijah the priest, and must be sampled in Jerusalem. It is a dangerous presumption to make innovations, if but in the circumstances of God's worship. Those human additions, which would seem to grace the institution of God, deprave it. That infinite wisdom knows best what will please itself, and prescribes accordingly. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Idolatry and falsehood is commonly more gaudy and plausible than truth.

That heart which can for the outward homeliness despise the ordinances of God is already aliened from true religion, and lies open to the grossest superstition.

Never any prince was so foully idolatrous as that he wanted a priest to second him. An Urijah is fit to humour an Ahaz. Greatness could never command any thing which some servile wits were not ready both to applaud and justify.

Ere the king can be returned from Damascus, the altar is finished. It were happy if true godliness could be so forward in the prosecutions of good.

Neither is this strange pile reared only, but thrust up betwixt God's altar and the temple in an apparent precedency, as if he had said, "Let the God of Judah come behind the deities of Syria."

And now, to make up the full measure of his impiety, this idolatrous king will himself be sacrificing upon his new altar to his new gods, the gods of Damascus. An usurped priesthood well becomes a false deity. *Because,* saith he, *the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.*

O blind superstition! How did the gods of Syria help their kings, when both those kings and their gods were vanquished and taken by the king of Assyria? Even this Damascus and this altar were the spoil of a foreign enemy. How then did the gods of Syria help their kings any other than to their ruin? What dotage is this, to make choice of a foiled protection? But had the Syrians prospered, must their gods have the thanks? Are there no authors of good but blocks or devils? or is an outward prosperity the only argument of truth, the only motive of devotion? O foolish Ahaz, it is the God thou hast forsaken that plagues thee, under whose only arm thou mightest have prevailed. His power beats those pagan stocks one against another; so as one while one seems victorious, another vanquished; and at last he confounds both, together with their proudest clients. Thyself shall be the best instance.

Of all the kings of Judah hitherto there is none so dreadful an example, either of sin or judgment, as this son of good Jotham. I abhor to think that such a monster should descend from the loins of David. Where should be the period of this wickedness? He began with the high places; thence he descends to the calves of Dan and Bethel: from thence he falls to a Syrian altar; to

the Syrian god: then, from a partnership he falls to an utter exclusion of the true God, and blocking up his temple: and then, to the sacrifice of his own son: and at last, as if hell were broken loose upon God's inheritance, every several city, every high place of Judah hath a new god. No marvel if he be branded by the Spirit of God with, *This is that king Ahaz.*

What a fearful plague did this noisome deluge of sin leave behind it in the land of Judah! Who can express the horror of God's revenge upon a people that should have been his? Pekah the king of Israel slew an hundred and twenty thousand of them in one day; amongst whom was Maaseiah the son of Ahaz. O just judgment of the Almighty! Ahaz sheds the blood of one son to an idol; the true God sheds the blood of another of his sons in revenge.

Yet the hand of the Lord is stretched out still. Two hundred thousand of them were carried away by the Israelites captive to Samaria. The Edomites came and carried away another part of them for bondslaves to their country.

The Philistines came up and shared the cities of the south of Judah and the villages thereof. Shortly, what other is miserable Judah than the prey and spoil of all the neighbouring nations? *For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of* [a] *Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.*

As for the great king of Ashur, whom Ahaz purchased with the sacrilegious pillage of the house of God, instead of an aid he proves a burden. However he sped in his first onsets, now *he distressed Judah, but strengthened it not.* The charge was as great as the benefit small: sooner shall he eat them out than rescue them. No arm of flesh can shelter Ahaz from a vengeance.

Be wise, O ye kings; be instructed, O ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

His subjects complain that he died so late, and, as repenting that he ever was, deny him a room in the sepulchres of kings: as if they said, "The common earth of Jerusalem is too good for him that degenerated from his progenitors, marred his kingdom, depraved his people, forsook his God."

[a] [Israel is here used as comprehending Judah. See bp. Patrick's note on "King of Israel," 2 Chron. xxviii. 19.]

THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.—2 Kings xvii.

Judah was at a sore heave, yet Israel shall miscarry before it. Such are the sins of both, that they strive whether shall fall first; but this lot must light upon the ten tribes. Though the late king of Judah were personally worse than the most of Jeroboam's successors, yet the people were generally less evil; upon whom the encroachments of idolatry were more by obtrusion than by consent: besides that, the thrones of Judah had some interchanges of good princes, Israel none at all. The same justice therefore that made Israel a scourge to Judah made Assyria a scorpion to Israel.

It was the quarrel of Judah that first engaged the king of Ashur in this war against Israel; now he is not so easily fetched off: so we have seen some eager mastiff, that hath been set on by the least clap of the hand, but could not be loosened by the force of staves.

Shalmaneser king of Assyria comes up against Hoshea king of Israel, and subdues him, and puts him to his tribute. This yoke was uncouth and unpleasing. The vanquished prince was neither able to resist nor willing to yield; secretly, therefore, he treats with the king of Egypt for assistance, as desiring rather to hazard his liberty by the hand of an equal, than to enjoy a quiet subjection under the hand of an overruling power. We cannot blame princes to be jealous of their sovereignties.

The detaining of his yearly tribute and the whisperings with new confederates have drawn up the king of Ashur to perfect his own victories. He returns therefore with a strong power, and, after three years' siege, takes Samaria, imprisons Hoshea, and, in the exchange of a woful captivity, he peoples Israel with Assyrians, and Assyria with Israelites.

Now that abused soil hath upon a surfeit of wickedness cast out her perfidious owners, and will try how it can fare with heathenish strangers. Now the Assyrian gallants triumph in the palaces of Samaria and Jezreel, while the peers and captains of Israel are driven manacled through the Assyrian streets, and billeted to the several places of their perpetual servitude. Shortly, now, the flourishing kingdom of the ten tribes is come to a final and shameful end; and so vanished in this last dissi-

pation, that, since that day, no man could ever say, "This was Israel."

O terrible example of vengeance upon that peculiar people, whom God hath chosen for himself out of all the world! All the world were witnesses of the favours of their miraculous deliverances and protections; all the world shall be witnesses of their just confusion.

It is not in the power of slight errors to set off that infinite mercy. What was it, O God, what was it that caused thee to cast off thine own inheritance? what but the same that made thee to cast the angels out of heaven? even their rebellious sins. Those sins dared to emulate the greatness of thy mercies no less than they forced the severity of thy judgments: *they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.*

Neither were these slips of frailty or ignorant mistakings, but wilful crimes, obstinate impieties, in spite of the doctrines, reproofs, menaces, miraculous convictions of the holy prophets which God sent amongst them. Thy destruction is of thyself, O Israel. What could the just hand of the Almighty do less than consume a nation so incorrigibly flagitious? a nation so unthankful for mercies, so impatient of remedies, so uncapable of repentance; so obliged, so warned; so shamelessly, so lawlessly wicked?

What nation under heaven can now challenge an indefeasible interest in God when Israel itself is cast off? what church in the world can show such dear love-tokens from the Almighty as this now abhorred and adulterous spouse? He that spared not the natural olive, shall he spare the wild? It is not for us sinners of the Gentiles to be highminded, but awful.

The Israelites are carried captive into Assyria. Those goodly cities of the ten tribes may not lie waste and unpeopled. The wisdom of the victor finds it fit to transplant his own colonies thither, that so he may raise profit thence with security. From Babylon therefore, and Cuthah, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim, doth he send of his own subjects to possess and inhabit the cities of Samaria.

The land doth not brook her new tenants. *They feared not*

the Lord; (how should they? they knew him not.) *Therefore the Lord sent lions amongst them, which slew some of them.* Not the veriest pagan can be excused for his ignorance of God; even the depravedest nature might teach us to tremble at a Deity. It is just with the Almighty not to put up neglect where he hath bestowed reason.

The brute creatures are sent to revenge the quarrel of their Maker upon worse beasts than themselves. Still hath God left himself champions in Israel. Lions tear the Assyrians in pieces, and put them in mind that had it not been for wickedness that land needed not to have changed masters. The great Lord of the world cannot want means to plague offenders. If the men be gone, yet the beasts are there; and if the beasts had been gone, yet so long as there were stones in the walls, in the quarries, God would be sure of avengers. There is no security but in being at peace with God.

The king of Assyria is sued to for remedy. Even these pagans have learned to know that these lions were sent from a God, that this punishment is for sin: *They know not the manner of the God of the land; therefore he hath sent lions among them.* These blind heathen, that think every land hath a several god, yet hold that God worthy of his own worship; yet hold that worship must be grounded upon knowledge; the want of that knowledge punishable; the punishment of that want just and divine. How much worse than Assyrians are they that are ready to ascribe all calamities to nature, to chance! that acknowledging but one God of all the world are yet careless to know him, to serve him!

One of the priests of Israel is appointed to be carried back to Samaria, to teach the Assyrian colony the fashions of the God of the land; not for devotion, but for impunity. Vain politicians think to satisfy God by patching up religions. Any forms are good enough for an unknown deity. The Assyrian priests teach and practise the worship of their own gods; the Israelitish priest prescribes the worship of the true God; the people will follow both; the one out of liking, the other out of fear.

What a prodigious mixture was here of religions; true with false, Jewish with paganish, divine with devilish! Every division of these transplanted Assyrians had their several deities, high places, sacrifices. This high priest of Israel intercommons with every of them, so that now these fathers of Samaritanism are in

at all; *They fear the Lord, and serve their idols.* No beggar's cloak is more pieced than the religion of these new inhabitants of Israel. I know not how their bodies sped for the lions; I am sure their souls fared the worse for this medley. Above all things, God hates a mongrel devotion. If we be not all Israel, it were better to be all Ashur. It cannot so much displease God to be unknown or neglected, as to be consorted with idols.

HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB.

2 Kings xviii, xix; 2 Chronicles xxix; Isaiah xxxvi, xxxvii.

Israel is gone; Judah is left standing; or rather some few sprigs of those two tribes: so we have seen, in the shredding of some large timber tree, one or two boughs left at the top to hold up the sap. Who can but lament the poor remainders of that languishing kingdom of David?

Take out of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin one hundred and twenty thousand, whom Pekah the king of Israel slew in one day; take out two hundred thousand that were carried away captive to Samaria; take out those that were transported into the bondage of the Edomites, and those that were subdued in the south parts by the Philistines; alas, what an handful was left to the king of Judah, scarce worth the name of a dominion!

Yet even now, out of the gleeds of Judah doth God raise up a glorious light to his forlorn Church; yea, from the wretched loins of Ahaz doth God fetch an holy Hezekiah. It had been hard to conceive the state of Judah worse than it was; neither was it more miserable than sinful; and, in regard of both, desperate; when beyond hope God revives this dying stock of David, and out of very ruins builds up his own house. Ahaz was not more the ill son of a good father, than he was the ill father of a good son. He was the ill son of good Jotham, the ill father of good Hezekiah. Good Hezekiah makes amends for his father's impiety, and puts a new life into the heartless remnant of God's people. The wisdom of our good God knows when his aid will be most seasonable, most welcome; which he then loves to give when he finds us left of all our hopes. That merciful hand is reserved for a dead lift; then he fails us not.

Now you might have seen this pious prince busily bestirring himself in so late and needful a reformation; removing the high

places, battering and burning the idols, demolishing their temples, cutting down their groves, opening the temple, purging the altars and vessels, sanctifying the priests, rekindling the lamps, renewing the incense, reinstituting the sacrifices, establishing the order of God's service, appointing the courses, settling the maintenance of the ministers, publishing the decrees for the long-neglected passover, celebrating it and the other feasts with due solemnity, encouraging the people, contributing bountifully to the offerings, and, in one word, so ordering all the affairs of God as if he had been sent down from heaven to restore religion; as if David himself had been alive again in this blessed heir, not so much of his crown as of his piety.

O Judah, happy in thy Hezekiah! O Hezekiah, happy in the gracious restoration of thy Judah!

Ahaz shall have no thank for such a son. The God that is able of the very stones to raise children to Abraham raises a true seed of David out of the corrupt loins of an idolater. That infinite mercy is not tied to the terms of an immediate propagation.

For the space of three hundred years the man after God's own heart had no perfect heir till now. Till now did the high places stand: the devotions of the best princes of Judah were blemished with some weak omissions: now the zeal of good Hezekiah clears all those defects, and works an entire change.

How seasonably hath the providence of God kept the best man for the worst times! When God hath a great work to do, he knows to fit himself with instruments.

No marvel if the paganish idols go to wrack, when even the brazen serpent that Moses had made by God's own appointment is broken in pieces. The Israelites were stung with fiery serpents; this brazen serpent healed them, which they did no sooner see than they recovered. But now, such was the venom of the Israelitish idolatry, that this serpent of brass stung worse than the fiery: that which first cured by the eye now by the eye poisoned the soul; that which was at first the type of a Saviour is now the deadly engine of the enemy. While it helped it stood; it stood while it hurt not; but when once wicked abuse hath turned it into an idol, what was it but Nehushtan!

The holiness of the first institution cannot privilege aught from the danger of a future profanation; nor, as the case may stand, from an utter abolition. What antiquity, what authority, what primary service might this serpent have pleaded? All that cannot

keep it out of the dust. Those things which are necessary in their being, beneficial in their continuance, may still remain when their abuse is purged: but those things whose use is but temporary, and whose duration is needless and unprofitable, may cease with the occasion, and much more perish with an inseparable abuse. Hezekiah willingly forgets who made the serpent when he sees the Israelites make it an idol. It is no less intolerable for God to have a rival of his own making.

Since Hezekiah was thus, above all his ancestors, upright with the Lord, it is no marvel if the Lord were with him; if he prospered whithersoever he went. The same God that would have his justice magnified in the confusion of the wicked princes of Israel and Judah, would have his mercy no less acknowledged in the blessings of faithful Hezekiah.

The great king of Assyria had in a sort swallowed up both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet not with an equal cruelty. He made Israel captive; Judah, upon a willing composition, tributary. Israel is vanished in a transportation; Judah continues under the homage wherein Ahaz left it. Hezekiah had reigned but six years when he saw his neighbours of Israel packing into a miserable captivity, and the proud Assyrians lording in their cities; yet even then, when he stood alone in a corner of Judah, durst Hezekiah draw his neck out of the yoke of the great and victorious monarch of Assyria; and, as if one enemy had not been enough, at the same time he falls upon the encroaching Philistines, and prevails. It is not to be asked what powers a man can make, but in what terms he stands with Heaven.

The unworthy father of Hezekiah had clogged Judah with this servile fealty to the Assyrian. What the conditions of that subjection were, it is too late, and needless for us to inquire. If this payment were limited to a period of time, the expiration acquitted him; if upon covenants of aid, the cessation thereof acquitted him: if the reforming of religion and banishment of idolatry ran under the censure of rebellion, the quarrel on Hezekiah's part was holy, on Sennacherib's unjust: but if the restipulation were absolute, and the withdrawing of this homage upon none but civil grounds, I cannot excuse the good king from a just offence. It was an human frailty in an obliged prince by force to effect a free and independent sovereignty.

What, do we mince that fact which holy Hezekiah himself censures? *I have offended, return from me; what thou puttest on*

me will I bear. The comfort of liberty may not be had with an unwarranted violence. Holiness cannot free us from infirmity. It was a weakness to do that act which must be soon undone with much repentance and more loss. This revolt shall cost Hezekiah, besides much humiliation, three hundred yearly talents of silver, thirty talents of gold. How much better had it been for the cities of Judah to have purchased their peace with an easy tribute, than war with intolerable taxation!

Fourteen years had good Hezekiah fed upon a sweet peace sauced only with a set pension, now he must prepare his palate for the bitter morsels of war. The king of Assyria is come up against all the defenced cities of Judah and hath taken them. Hezekiah is fain to buy him out with too many talents. The poor kingdom of Judah is exhaust with so deep a payment, insomuch as the king is forced to borrow of God himself, for *Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord;* yea, *at that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which he had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.*

How hard was good Hezekiah driven ere he would be thus bold with his God! Surely if the mines or coffers of Judah could have yielded any supply, this shift had been hateful; to fetch back for an enemy that which he had given to his Maker. Only necessity excuses that from sacrilege in the son which Will made sacrilege in the father. That which is once devoted to a sacred use may not be called back to a profane: but he, whose the earth is, and the fulness of it, is not so taken with our metals, that he should more regard our gold than our welfare. His goodness cannot grudge any outward thing for the price of our peace. To rob God out of covetousness or wantonness or neglect is justly damnable: we cannot rob him out of our need, for then he gives us all we take, and bids us ransom our lives, our liberties. The treasures of God's house were precious for his sake to whom they were consecrated, but more precious in the sight of the Lord was the life of any one of his saints.

Every true Israelite was the spiritual house of God. Why should not the door of the material temple be willingly stripped to save the whole frame of the spiritual temple? Take therefore, O Hezekiah, what thou hast given; no gold is too holy to redeem thy vexation: it matters not so much how bare the doors of the temple be, in a case of necessity, as how well the insides be fur-

nished with sincere devotion. O the cruel hardheartedness of those men which will rather suffer the living temples of God to be ruined than they will ransom their life with farthings!

It could not be but that the store of needy Judah must soon be drawn dry with so deep an exaction. That sum cannot be sent, because it cannot be raised; the cruel tyrant calls for his bricks, while he allows no straw. His anger is kindled because Hezekiah's coffers have a bottom; with a mighty host doth he come up against Jerusalem; therefore shall that city be destroyed by him, because by him it hath been impoverished; the inhabitants must be slaves, because they are beggars.

O lamentable, and in sight desperate condition of distressed Jerusalem! Wealth it had none; strength it had but a little; all the country round about was subdued to the Assyrian; that proud victor hath begirt the walls of it with an innumerable army, scorning that such a shovelful of earth should stand out but one day: poor Jerusalem stands alone, blocked up with a world of enemies, helpless, friendless, comfortless, looking for the worst of a hostile fury, when Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh, the great captains of the Assyrians, call to a parley. Hezekiah sends to them three of his prime officers, his steward, his secretary, his recorder.

Lord, what insolent blasphemies doth that foul mouth of Rabshakeh belch out against the living God, against his anointed servant! how plausibly doth he discourage the subjects of Hezekiah! how proudly doth he insult upon their impotency! how doth he brave them with base offers of advantage! and lastly, how cunningly doth he forelay their confidence, which was only left them in the Almighty, protesting not to be come up thither without the Lord; *The Lord said to me, Go up to this land and destroy it.*

How fearful a word was this! the rest were but vain cracks: this was a thunderbolt to strike dead the heart of Hezekiah. If Rabshakeh could have been believed, Jerusalem could not but have flown open. How could it think to stand out no less against God than men? Even thus doth the great enemy of mankind; if he can dishearten the soul from a dependence upon the God of mercies, the day is his. Lewd miscreants care not how they belie God for their own purposes.

Eliakim, the steward of Hezekiah, well knew how much the people must needs be affected with this pernicious suggestion,

and fain would therefore, if not stop that wicked mouth, yet divert these blasphemies into a foreign expression. I wonder that any wise man should look for favour from an enemy: *Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language.* What was this but to teach an adversary how to do mischief? Wherefore came Rabshakeh thither but to gall Hezekiah, to withdraw his subjects? That tongue is properest for him which may hurt most. Deprecations of evil to a malicious man are no better than advices. An unknown idiom is fit to keep counsel: they are familiar words that must convey aught to the understanding.

Lewd men are the worse for admonitions. Rabshakeh had not so strained his throat to corrupt the citizens of Jerusalem, had it not been for the humble obtestation of Eliakim. Now he rears up his voice, and holds his sides, and roars out his double blasphemies; one while affrighting the people with the great power of the mighty king of Assyria; another while debasing the contemptible force of Hezekiah: now smoothly alluring them with the assurances of a safe and successful yieldance; then discouraging them with the impossibility of their deliverance, laying before them the fearful examples of greater nations vanquished by that sword which was now shaken over them; triumphing in the impotency and miscarriage of their gods: *Who are they among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? Where are the gods of Arpad and of Hamath?* Where? but in that hellish darkness that is ordained both for them and for thee, barbarous Assyrian, that darest thus open thy mouth against thy Maker. And can those atheous eyes of thine see no difference of gods? Is there no distance betwixt a stock or stone and that infinite Deity that made heaven and earth? It is enough that thou now feelest it. Thy torments have taught thee too late that thou affrontedst a living God.

How did the fingers and tongues of those Jewish peers and people itch to be at Rabshakeh in a revengeful answer to those impieties! All is hushed; not a word sounds from those walls. I do not more wonder at Hezekiah's wisdom in commanding silence, than at the subjects' obedience in keeping it. This railer could not be more spited than with no answer; and if he might be exasperated, he could not be reformed. Besides, the rebounding of those multiplied blasphemies might leave some ill impressions in

the multitude. This sulphurous flask therefore dies in his own smoke, only leaving a hateful stench behind it.

Good Hezekiah cannot easily pass over this devilish oratory. No sooner doth he hear of it than he rends his clothes, and covers himself with sackcloth, and betakes himself to the house of the Lord; and sends his officers and the gravest of the priests, clad in sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet of God, with a doleful and querulous message.

O the noble piety of Hezekiah! Notwithstanding all the straits of the siege, and the danger of so powerful an enemy, I find not the garments of this good king any otherwise than whole and unchanged; but now, so soon as ever a blasphemy is uttered against the majesty of his God, though by a pagan dog, his clothes are torn and turned into sackcloth. There can be no better argument of an upright heart than to be more sensible of the indignities offered to God than of our own dangers. Even these desperate reproaches send Hezekiah to the temple. The more we see God's name profaned, the more shall we, if we be truly religious, love and honour it.

Whither should Hezekiah run but to the temple, to the prophet? There, there is the refuge of all faithful ones; where they may speak with God, where they may be spoken to from God, and fetch comfort from both.

It is not possible that a believing heart should be disappointed. Isaiah sends that message to the good king that may dry up his tears, and cheer his countenance, and change his suit; *Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Syria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.*

Lo, even while Sennacherib was in the height of his jollity and assurance God's prophet foresees his ruin, and gives him for dead while that tyrant thought of nothing but life and victory. Proud and secure worldlings little dream of the near approach of their judgments; while they are plotting their deepest designs, the overruling justice of the Almighty hath contrived their sudden confusion, and sees and sets them their day.

Rabshakeh returns; and finding the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, reports to him the silent, and therein contemptuous answer, and firm resolutions of Hezekiah. In the

mean time God pulls Sennacherib by the ear, with the news of the approaching army of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia; which was coming up to raise the siege, and to succour his confederates. That dreadful power will not allow the Assyrian king in person to lead his other forces up against Jerusalem, nor to continue his former leaguer long before those walls; but now he writes big words to Hezekiah; and thinks with his thundering menaces to beat open the gates and level the bulwarks of Jerusalem. Like the true master of Rabshakeh he reviles the God of heaven, and basely parallels him with the dunghill deities of the heathen.

Good Hezekiah gets him into his sanctuary. There he spreads the letter before the Lord, and calls to the God that dwells between the cherubims to revenge the blasphemies of Sennacherib, to protect and rescue himself and his people.

Every one of those words pierced Heaven; which was no less open to mercy unto Hezekiah than vengeance to Sennacherib. Now is Isaiah addressed with a second message of comfort to him who doubtless distrusted not the first; only the reiteration of that furious blasphemy made him take faster hold by his faithful devotion. Now the jealous God, in a disdain of so blasphemous a contestation, rises up in a style of majesty, and gloriously tramples upon this saucy insolency; *Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook into thy nose, and my bridle into thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way thou camest.* Lo, Sennacherib, the God of heaven makes a beast of thee, who hast so brutishly spurned at his name. If thou be a ravenous bear, he hath an hook for thy nostrils; if thou be a resty horse, he hath a bridle for thy mouth: in spite of thee thou shalt follow his hook or his bridle, and shalt be led to thy just shame by either.

It is not for us to be the lords of our own actions: *Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came shall he return, &c.* Impotent men, what are we in the hands of the Almighty! We purpose; he overrules: we talk of great matters, and think to do wonders; he blows upon our projects, and they vanish with ourselves. He that hath set bounds to the sea hath appointed limits to the rage of the proudest enemies; yea, even the devils themselves are confined. *Why boast ye yourselves, O ye tyrants, that ye can do mischief?* Ye are stinted; and even within those lists is confusion.

O the trophies of divine justice! *That very night the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they rose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.*

How speedy an execution was this! how miraculous! No human arm shall have the glory of this victory. It was God that was defied by that presumptuous Assyrian; it is God that shall right his own wrongs. Had the Egyptian or Ethiopian forces been come up, though the same God had done this work by them, yet some praise of this slaughter had perhaps cleaved to their fingers; now an invisible hand sheds all this blood, that his very enemies may clear him from all partnership of revenge.

Go now, wicked Sennacherib, and tell of the gods of Hamath, and Arpad, and Sepharvaim, and Hena, and Ivah, which thou hast destroyed, and say that Hezekiah's God is but as one of these. Go, and add this Deity to the number of thy conquests. Now say that Hezekiah's God, in whom he trusted, hath deceived him, and graced thy triumphs.

With shame and grief enough is that sheeped tyrant returned to his Nineveh, having left behind him all the pride and strength of Assyria for compost to the Jewish fields.

Well were it for thee, O Sennacherib, if thou couldest escape thus. Vengeance waits for thee at home, and welcomes thee into thy place. While thou art worshipping in the house of Nisroch thy god, two of thine own sons shall be thine executioners. See now if that false deity of thine can preserve thee from that stroke which the true God sends thee by the hand of thine own flesh. He that slew thine host by his angels slays thee by thy sons. The same angel that killed all those thousands could as easily have smitten thee, but he rather reserves thee for the further torment of an unnatural stroke, that thou mayest see too late how easy it is for him in spite of thy god to arm thine own loins against thee.

Thou art avenged, O God, thou art avenged plentifully of thine enemies. Whosoever strives with thee is sure to gain nothing but loss, but shame, but death, but hell. The Assyrians are slain, Sennacherib is rewarded for his blasphemy, Jerusalem is rescued, Hezekiah rejoices, the nations wonder and tremble. *O love the Lord, all ye saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plenteously rewardeth the proud doer.*

HEZEKIAH SICK, RECOVERED, VISITED.

2 Kings xx; 2 Chronicles xxxii; Isaiah xxxviii.

Hezekiah was freed from the siege of the Assyrians, but he is surprised with a disease. He that delivered him from the hand of his enemies smites him with sickness. God doth not let us loose from all afflictions when he redeems us from one.

To think that Hezekiah was either not thankful enough for his deliverance, or too much lifted up with glory of so miraculous a favour, were an injurious misconstruction of the hand of God, and an uncharitable censure of an holy prince; for though no flesh and blood can avoid the just desert of bodily punishment, yet God doth not always strike with an intuition of sin; sometimes he regards the benefit of our trial, sometimes the glory of his mercy in our cure.

It was no slight distemper that seized upon Hezekiah, but a disease both painful and fierce, and in nature deadly. O God, how thou lashest even those whom thou lovest! Hadst thou ever any such darling in the throne of Judah as Hezekiah? Yet he no sooner breatheth from a miserable siege, than he panteth under a mortal sickness. When as yet he had not so much as the comfort of a child to succeed him, thy prophet is sent to him with the heavy message of his death; *Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.* It is no small mercy of God that he gives us warning of our end. We shall make an ill use of so gracious a premonition, if we make not a meek preparation for our passage. Even those that have not an house yet have a soul. No soul can want important affairs, to be ordered for a final dissolution. The neglect of this best thrift is desperate. Set thy soul in order, O man; for thou shalt die, and not live.

If God had given Hezekiah a son, nature had bequeathed his estate; now he must study to find heirs. Even these outward things, though in themselves worthless, require our careful disposition to those we leave behind us; and if we have delayed these thoughts till then, our sick beds may not complain of their importunity. We cannot leave to our families a better legacy than peace.

Never was the prophet Isaiah unwelcome to this good king until now. Even sad tidings must be carried by those messengers which would be faithful; neither may we regard so much how they will be taken, as by whom they are sent.

It was a bold and harsh word to say to a king, *Thou shalt die, and not live.* I do not hear Hezekiah rage and fret at the message, or threat the bearer, but he meekly turns his face to the wall, and weeps and prays.

Why to the wall? Was it for the greater secrecy of his devotion? was it for the more freedom from all distraction? was it that the passion which accompanied his prayer might have no witnesses? or was it for that this wall looked towards the temple, which his heart and eyes still moved unto, though his feet could not?

Howsoever, the patient soul of good Hezekiah turns itself to that holy God from whom he smarts and bleeds, and pours out itself into a fervent deprecation; *I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.*

Couldst thou fear, O Hezekiah, that God had forgotten thine integrity, the grace that was in thee was his own work; could he in thee neglect himself? or dost thou therefore doubt of his remembrance of thy faithfulness, because he summons thee to receive the crown of thy faithfulness, glory and immortality? Wherein canst thou be remembered, if this be to forget thee? What challenge is this? Is God a debtor to thy perfection? Hath thine holy carriage merited any thing from that infinite justice? Far, far were these presumptuous conceits from that humble and mortified soul. Thou hadst hated thine own breast if it could once have harboured so proud a thought. This perfection of thine was no other than an honest soundness of heart and life, which thou knewest God had promised to reward. It was the mercy of the covenant that thou pleadedst, not the merit of thine obedience.

Every one of these words was steeped in tears: but what meant these words, these tears? I hear not of any suit moved by Hezekiah; only he wishes to be remembered in that which could never be forgotten, though he should have entreated for an oblivion.

Speak out, Hezekiah. What is it that thy tears crave, while thy lips express not? *O let me live, and I shall praise thee, O God.*

In a natural man, none could wonder at this passionate request: who cannot but wonder at it in a saint; whose happiness doth but then begin when his life ceaseth; whose misery doth but then end when his death enters? The word of faith is, "O let

me die that I may enjoy thee." How then doth the good king cry at the news of that death which some resolute pagans have entertained with smiles? Certainly, the best man cannot strip himself of some flesh; and while nature hath an undeniable share in him, he cannot but retain some smatch of the sweetness of life, of the horror of dissolution. Both these were in Hezekiah; neither of them could transport him into this passion: they were higher respects that swayed with so holy a prince; a tender care of the glory of God, a careful pity of the Church of God. His very tears said, "O God, thou knowest that the eyes of the world are bent upon me, as one that hath abandoned their idolatry, and restored thy sincere worship. I stand alone, in the midst of a wicked and idolatrous generation, that looks through all my actions, all my events: if now they shall see me snatched away in the midst of my days, what will these heathen say? How can thy great name but suffer in this my untimely extinction? Besides, what will become of thy poor Church which I shall leave feebly religious, and as yet scarce warm in the course of a pious reformation? how soon shall it be miserably overgrown with superstition and heathenism! how soon shall the wild boar of Assyria root up this little vineyard of thine! What need I beseech thee, O Lord, to regard thy name, to regard thine inheritance?"

What one tear of Hezekiah can run waste? what can that good king pray for unheard, unanswered? Sennacherib came in a proud confidence to swallow up his city and people; prayers and tears send him away confounded: death comes to swallow up his person, and that not without authority; prayers and tears send him away disappointed. Before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, *Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord; and I will add to thy days fifteen years.*

What shall we say then, O God! Hast thou thus soon changed thy purpose? was it not thy true message which thy prophet, even now, delivered to Hezekiah? Is somewhat fallen out that thou foresawest not? or dost thou now decree somewhat thou meanest not? The very thought of any of these were no better than blasphemous impiety. Certainly, Hezekiah could not live

one day longer than was eternally decreed. The decree of God's eternal counsel had from everlasting determined him fifteen years yet longer: why then doth God say by his prophet, *Thou shalt die, and not live?* He is not as man, that he should repent. The message is changed, the will is not changed: yea rather the message is explicated, not changed; for the signified will of God, though it sound absolutely, yet must be understood with condition: that tells Hezekiah what he must expect from the nature of his disease; what would befall him without his deprecations. There was nothing but death in the second causes, whatever secret purpose there was in the first; and that purpose shall lie hid for a time under a reserved condition. The same decree that says, *Nineveh shall be destroyed,* means, if Nineveh repent it shall not be destroyed. He that finds good reason to say, "Hezekiah shall die," yet still means, if the quickened devotion of Hezekiah shall importune me for life, it shall be protracted. And the same God that hath decreed this addition of fifteen years had decreed to stir up the spirit of Hezekiah to that vehement and weeping importunity which should obtain it. O God, thou workest thy good pleasure in us and with us; and, by thy revealed will, movest us in those ways whereby thou effectest thy secret will.

How wonderful is this mercy! Hezekiah's tears are not dry upon his cheeks, yea his breath is not passed his lips, when God sends him a comfortable answer. How careful is the God of compassions that his holy servant should not languish one hour in the expectation of his denounced death! What speed was here, as in the errand so in the act of recovery! Within three days shall Hezekiah be upon his feet; yea his feet shall stand in the courts of God's house. He that now in his bed sighs and groans and weeps out a petition, shall then sing out a thanksgiving in the temple: *O thou that hearest the prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.* With what cheerful assurance should we approach to the throne of that grace which never failed any suppliant!

Neither was this grant more speedy than bountiful. We are wont to reckon seven years for the life of a man; and now, behold, more than two lives hath God added to the age of Hezekiah.

How unexampled a favour is this! Who ever, but Hezekiah, knew his period so long before? The fixedness of his term is no less mercy than the protraction. We must be content to live or

die at uncertainties. We are not worthy to calculate the date of our own times: *Teach us, O Lord, so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.*

There is little joy in many days if they be evil. Hezekiah shall not be blessed only with life, but with peace. The proud Assyrian threatens an invasion. His late foil still sticks in his stomach, and stirs him to a revenge. The hook is in his nostrils; he cannot move whither he list. The God of heaven will maintain his own quarrel; *I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.*

Lo, for his life Hezekiah is beholden, next under the infinite goodness of God, to his prayers; for his protection, to the dear memory of his father David. Surely, for aught we find, Hezekiah was no less upright and less offensive than David; yet, both Hezekiah and Jerusalem shall fare the better for David's sake, above three hundred years after. To that man after his own heart had God engaged himself by his gracious promise to preserve his throne, his seed. God loves to remember his ancient mercies. How happy a thing is it to be faithful with God! This is the way to oblige those which are yet unborn, and to entail blessings upon the successions of future generations.

It seems it was some pestilent ulcer that thus endangered the life of Hezekiah. Isaiah is not a prophet only, but a physician. *And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs.* He that gave an assurance of recovery gives a receipt for the recovery.

The decree of God includes the means. Neither can the medicine work without a word; neither will the word work without the medicine: both of them must meet in the cure. If we so trust the promise that we neglect the prescript, we presume to no purpose. Happy is that soul that so regards the promise of God's prophets as that withal he receives their counsels.

Nothing could be more proper for the ripening of hard and purulent tumours than dry figs. Herein, Isaiah's direction was according to nature. Wherefore should we balk the ordinary road where it is both fair and near?

The sudden contradiction of the message causes a just difficulty in the assent. Hezekiah therefore craves a sign; not for that he distrusted, but that he might trust the more. We can never take too fast hold of those promises of God which have not more comfort in the application than natural impossibility in the performance. We believe, Lord, help our unbelief.

The sick king hath his option. His father was offered a sign, and refused it; he sues for one, and obtains it. *Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or back ten degrees?* as if heaven itself lay open to his choice, and were ready either to mend his pace or retire for his confirmation. What creature is not cheerfully forward to obey the faith of God's servants?

Hezekiah fastens rather upon that sign which is more hard, more disagreeing from the course of nature, not without good reason. Every proof must be clearer than the thing to be proved; neither may there want a meet proportion betwixt both: now the going forward of the shadow was a motion no other than natural; the recovery of that pestilent disease was against the stream of nature; the more difficult sign therefore, the surer evidence.

Whether shall we more wonder, at the measure of the love of God to Hezekiah, or at the power of Isaiah's faith in God? Out of both, either the sun goes back in heaven, that his shadow may go back on earth; or the shadow no less miraculously goes back on earth, while the sun goes forward in heaven. It is true, that the prophet speaks of the shadow, not of the sun; except perhaps because the motion of the sun is best discerned by the shadow, and the motion of the shadow is led by the course of the sun: besides that, the demonstration of this miracle is reported to be local in the dial of Ahaz, not universal in the sensible length of the day: withal, the retreat of the sun had made a public and noted change in the frame of nature; this particular alteration of the shadow, in places limited, might satisfy no less, without a confusive mutation in the face of the world. Whethersoever; to draw the sun back together with the shadow, or to draw the shadow back without the sun, was the proof of a divine omnipotence; able therefore to draw back the life of Hezekiah fifteen degrees from the night of death towards which it was hasting. O God, thou wilt rather alter the course of heaven and earth than the faith of thy children shall sink for want of supportation.

It should seem, the Babylonians, finding the Assyrians' power abated by the revengeful hand of God's angel and their own discord, took this advantage of a revolt; and now, to strengthen their part, fall in with Hezekiah king of Judah, whom they found the old enemy to the Assyrians and the great favourite of heaven. Him they woo with gifts, him they congratulate with ambassages. The fame of Hezekiah's sickness, recovery, form and assurance of

cure, has drawn thither messengers and presents from Merodach Baladan, king of Babylon.

The Chaldees were curious searchers into the secrets of nature, especially into the motions of the celestial bodies. Though there had been no politic relations, this very astronomical miracle had been enough to fetch them to Jerusalem, that they might see the man for whose sake the sun forsook his place or the shadow forsook the sun.

How easily have we seen those holy men miscarried by prosperity against whom no miseries could prevail? He that stood out stoutly against all the Assyrian's onsets, clinging the faster to his God, by how much he was harder assaulted by Sennacherib, melteth now with these Babylonian favours, and runs abroad into offensive weaknesses.

The Babylonian ambassadors are too welcome to Hezekiah. As a man transported with the honour of their respective and costly visitations, he forgets his tears and his turning to the wall; he forgets their incompatible idolatry; so hugging them in his bosom, as if there had been no cause of strangeness. All his doors fly open to them, and, in a vainglorious ostentation, all his new-gathered treasures, all his strong armories entertain their eyes; nothing in his house, nothing in his dominion is hid from them.

O Hezekiah, what means this impotent ambition? it is not long since thou tarest off the very plates of the temple-doors to give unto Sennacherib, and can thy treasures be suddenly so multiplied, that they can be worthy to astonish foreign beholders? or, if thy storehouse were as rich as the earth, can thy heart be so vain as to be lifted up with these heavy metals? didst thou not see that heaven itself was at thy beck whilst thou wert humbled? and shall a little earthly dross have power over thy soul? can the flattering applause of strangers let thee loose into a proud joy whom the late message of God's prophet resolved into tears? O God, if thou do not keep us as well in our sunshine as in our storm, we are sure to perish. As "in all time of our tribulation," so "in all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us."

Alas, how slight doth this weakness seem in our eyes, to rejoice in the abundance of God's blessings! to call in foreign friends to be witnesses of our plenty! to raise our conceits some little upon the acclamations of others upon the value of our own abilities!

Lay thy hand upon thy mouth, O foolish flesh and blood, when thou seest the censure of thy Maker.

Isaiah the prophet is sent speedily to Hezekiah with a sharp and heart-breaking message; *Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.*

No sin can be light in Hezekiah. The holiness of the person adds to the unholiness of the act. Eminency of profession doubles both the offence and the judgment. This glory shall end in an ignominious loss. The great and holy God will not digest pride in any, much less in his own.

That which was the subject of Hezekiah's sin shall be the matter of his punishment; those with whom he sinned shall be his avengers. It was his treasure and munition wherein he prides himself to these men of Babylon; the men of Babylon shall carry away his treasure and munition. What now doth Hezekiah but tempt them with a glorious booty, as some fond traveller that would show his gold to a thief?

These worldly things are farthest off from the heart. Perhaps Hezekiah might not be much troubled with their loss. Lo, God comes closer to him yet.

As yet was Hezekiah childless. How much better had it been to continue so still than to be plagued in his issue! He shall now beget children to servitude; his loins shall yield pages to the court of Babylon; while he sees them born princes, he shall foresee them made eunuchs in a foreign palace. What comfort can he take in the wishes and hopes of sons, when ere they be born he hears them destined to captivity and bondage?

This rod was smart, yet good Hezekiah kisses it. His heart struck him no less than the mouth of the prophet; meekly therefore doth he yield to this divine correction, "*Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.* Thou hast spoken this word, but from the Lord. It is not thine, but his; and being his, it must needs be like himself, good; good because it is just, for I have deserved more and worse; good because merciful, for I suffer not according to my deserts. *Is it not good, if there be peace and truth in my days?* I have deserved a present payment; O God, thou deferrest it; I have deserved it in person, thou reservest it for those whom I cannot yet so feel, because they are not: I have deserved war and tumult, thou favourest me with peace:

I have deserved to be overrun with superstition and idolatry, thou blessest me with truth; shouldst thou continue truth unto me, though upon the most unquiet terms, the blessing were too good for me; but now thou hast promised, and wilt not reverse it, that both truth and peace shall be in my days: Lord, I adore thy justice, I bless thy mercy."

God's children are neither waspish nor sullen when they are chid or beaten, but patiently hold their backs to the stripes of a displeased mercy; knowing how much more God is to be magnified for what he might have done, than repined at for what he hath done; resigning themselves over into the hand of that gracious justice which in their smart seeks their reformation and glory.

MANASSEH.—2 Kings xxi; 2 Chronicles xxxiii.

At last, some three years after his recovery, Hezekiah hath a son, but such a one as, if he could have foreseen orbity, had been a blessing.

Still in the throne of Judah there is a succession and interchange of good and evil. Good Jotham is succeeded by wicked Ahaz; wicked Ahaz is succeeded by good Hezekiah; good Hezekiah is succeeded by wicked Manasseh. Evil princes succeed to good for the exercise of the Church, and good succeed to evil for the comfort of the Church.

The young years of Manasseh give advantage to his miscarriage; even while he might have been under the ferule he swayed the sceptre. Whither may not a child be drawn, especially to a garish and puppet-like superstition? As infancy is capable of all impressions, so most of the worst.

Neither did Manasseh begin more early than he held out long: he reigned more years than his good father lived, notwithstanding the miraculous addition to his age, more than ever any king of Judah besides could reach. Length of days is no true rule of God's favour. As plants last longer than sensitive creatures, and brute creatures outlive the reasonable; so amongst the reasonable it is no news for the wickedly great to inherit these earthly glories longer than the best.

There wants not apparent reason for this difference. Good princes are fetched away to a better crown; they cannot be

losers that exchange a weak and fading honour for a perfection and eternity of blessedness: wicked men live long to their own disadvantage; they do but carry so many more brands to their hell. If therefore there be a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there be a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness, far be it from us either to pity the removal of the just, or to envy the continuance of the wicked: this continues to his loss; that departs to a happy advancement.

It is very like that Hezekiah, marrying so late, in the vigour both of his age and holiness, made a careful choice of a wife suitable to his own piety. Neither had his delight been so much in her (according to her name), if her delight had not been as his in God. Their issue swerves from both, so fully inheriting the vices of his grandfather Ahaz, as if there had been no intervention of an Hezekiah. So we have seen the kernel of a well-fruited plant degenerate into that crab or willow which gave the original to his stock. Yet can I not say that Hezekiah was as free from traducing evil to his son Manasseh as Ahaz was free from traducing good to his son Hezekiah? Evil is incorporated in the best nature, whereas even the least good descends from above.

We may not measure grace by means. Was it possible that Manasseh, having been trained up in the religious court of his father Hezekiah, under the eye of so holy prophets and priests, under the shadow of the temple of God, after a childhood seasoned with so gracious precepts, with so frequent exercise of devotion, should run thus wild into all heathenish abominations; as if there had been nothing but idolatry in the seed of his conception, in the milk of his nourishment, in the rules of his institution, in the practice of his examples? How vain are all outward helps without the influence of God's Spirit! and that Spirit breathes where he listeth. Good education raiseth great hopes, but the proof of them is in the divine benediction.

I fear to look at the outrages of this wicked son of Hezekiah. What havock doth he make in the Church of God! as if he had been born to ruin religion; as if his only felicity had been to untwist or tear in one day that holy web which his father had been weaving nine-and-twenty years; and contrarily, to set up in one hour that offensive pile which had been above three hundred years in pulling down; so long had the high places stood. The zeal of Hezekiah in demolishing them honoured him above all his predecessors; and now the first act of this green head was their

reedifying. That mischief may be done in a day which many ages cannot redress.

Fearful were the presages of these bold beginnings. From the misbuilding of these chapels of the hills to the true God, Manasseh proceeds to erecting of altars to a false, even to Baal, the god of Ahab, the stale idol of the heathen. Yet further; not content with so few deities, he worships all the host of heaven; and, that he might despite God yet more, he sets up altars to these abused rivals of their Maker in the very house of the Lord. That holy place doth he not fear to defile with the graven image of the grove that he had made. Never Amorite did so wickedly as Manasseh; and, which was yet worse, it sufficed not to be thus wicked himself, but he seduced God's people to these abominations; and. that his example might move the more, he spares not his own son from the fire of the idol-sacrifice. Neither were his witcheries less enormous than his idolatry; he observed times, he used enchantments, he dealt with familiar spirits, and with wizards. Neither were either of these worse than his cruelty; he shed innocent blood till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.

O Manasseh, how no less cruel wert thou to thine own soul than to thy Judah! What an hideous list of monstrous impiety is here, any one of which were enough to draw judgment upon a world! but what hell is sufficient for all together?

What brows are not now lifted up to an attentive expectation of some present and fearful vengeance from God upon such flagitious wickedness? *Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.* The person of Manasseh is not capable of revenge enough; as his sin dilated itself by an infectious diffusion to his people, so shall the punishment. We are sensible of the least touch of our own miseries; how rarely are we affected with other men's calamities! yet this evil shall be such, as that the rumour of it shall beat no ear that shall not glow with an astonishing commiseration. What then, O God, what shall that plague be which thou threatenest with so much preface of horror? *I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down: and I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and I will deliver them into the hand of their enemies;*

and they shall become a prey and a spoil unto all their enemies.

It is enough, O God, it is enough. What ear can but tingle, what eye can but weep, what hair can but start up, what heart can be but confounded at the mention of so dreadful a revenge? Can there be a worse judgment than desolation, captivity, desertion, spoil, and torture of prevailing enemies? But however other cities and nations have undergone these disasters without wonder, that all this should befall to thy Jerusalem, the place which thou hast chosen to thyself out of the whole earth, the lot of thine inheritance, the seat of thine abode, whereof thou hast said, *Here shall be my rest for ever*, it is able to amaze all eyes, all ears.

No city could fare worse than Samaria, whose inhabitants, after a woful siege, were driven like cattle into a wretched servitude. Jerusalem shall fare no better from Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; Jerusalem, the glory of the earth, the darling of heaven. See, O ye vain men, that boast of the privileges of chairs and churches, see and tremble. There is no place under heaven to which the presence of God is so wedded, as that the sins thereof shall not procure a disdainful and final divorce. The height of former favours shall be but an aggravation of vengeance.

This total vastation of Jerusalem shall take time. Onwards, God begins with the person of wicked Manasseh, against whom he stirs up the captains of the host of the late friend and old enemy of Judah. Those thorns amongst which he had shrouded his guilty head cannot shelter him from their violence. They take him, and bind him with fetters of iron, and carry him to Babylon. There he lies loaded with chains in an uncomfortable dungeon, exercised with variety of tortures, fed with such coarse pittances of bread and sips of water as might maintain an unwilling life to the punishment of the owner.

What eye can now pity the deepest miseries of Manasseh? What but bondage can befit him that hath so lawlessly abused his liberty? What but an utter abdication can befit him that hath cast off his God and doted upon devils? What but a dying life and a tormenting death can be fit for a man of blood?

Who now would not have given this man for lost, and have looked when hell should claim her own? But O the height, O the depth of divine mercy! After all these prodigies of sin, Manasseh is a convert; *When he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of*

his fathers. How true is that word of the prophet, *Vexation gives understanding!* The viper when he is lashed casts up his poison. The traitor when he is racked tells that truth which he had else never uttered. If the cross bear us not to heaven nothing can. What use were there of the grain but for the edge of the sickle wherewith it is cut down, the stroke of the flail wherewith it is beaten, the weight and attrition of the mill wherewith it is crushed, the fire of the oven wherewith it is baken?

Say now, Manasseh, with that grandfather of thine, who was till now too good for thee, *It was good for me that I was afflicted.* Even thine iron was more precious to thee than thy gold; thy gaol was a more happy lodging to thee than thy palace; Babylon was a better school to thee than Jerusalem. What fools are we to frown upon our afflictions! These, how crabbed soever, are our best friends. They are not indeed for our pleasure, they are for our profit; their issue makes them worthy of a welcome. What do we care how bitter that potion be which brings health?

How far a man may go and yet turn! Could there be fouler sins than these? Lo, here was idolatry in the height, violation of God's house, sorceries of all kinds, bloody cruelty to his own flesh, to the saints of God; and all these against the stream of a religious institution, of the zealous counsels of God's prophets, of the checks of his own heart!

Who can complain that the way of heaven is blocked up against him when he sees such a sinner enter? Say the worst against thyself, O thou clamorous soul! here is one that murdered men, defied God, worshipped devils, and yet finds the way to repentance. If thou be worse than he, deny, if thou canst, that to thyself which God hath not denied to thee, capacity of grace; in the mean time know that it is not thy sin, but thine impenitence that bars heaven against thee.

Presume not yet, O man, whosoever thou art, of the liberty of thy conversion, as if thou couldest run on lawlessly in a course of sinning till thou come to the brim of hell, and then couldst suddenly stop and return at leisure. The mercy of God never set period to a wilful sinner, neither yet did his own corrupt desires, so as, when he is gone the farthest, he could yet stay himself from another step. No man that truly repents is refused, but many a one sins so long that he cannot repent. His custom of wickedness hath obdured his heart, and made it flint to all good

impressions. There were Jeroboams, and Abijams, and Ahabs, and Joashes, and Ahazes, in these sacred thrones; there was but one Manasseh. God hath not left in any man's hand the reins of his own heart, to pace and turn and stop as he lists. This privilege is reserved to him that made it: *It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that showeth mercy;* and that mercy neglected justly binds over to judgment.

I wonder not at Manasseh either sinning or repenting: I wonder at thy goodness, O Lord, who, after thy just permission of his sin, callest him thus graciously to repent, and so receivest him repenting; so as Manasseh was not a more loathsome and monstrous spectacle of wickedness, than he is now a pleasing and useful pattern of conversion. Who can now despair of thy mercy, O God, that sees the tears of a Manasseh accepted? When we have debauched our worst, our evil cannot match with thy goodness. Rather it is the praise of thine infinite store, that where sin abounds grace abounds much more. O keep us from a presumption of grace, that we may repent, and raise us from a distrust of grace when we have repented.

No sooner is Manasseh penitent than he is free. His prayers have at once loosed him from his sins and from his chains; and of a captive have made him a king; and from the dungeon of Babylon have restored him to the palace of Jerusalem. How easy is it for the same hand that wounds, to cure! What cannot fervent prayers do, either for our rescuing from evil, or for our investing with good!

Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. Then? and not before? Could his younger years escape the knowledge of God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians? Could he but know the slaughter that God's angel made in one night of a hundred fourscore and five thousand? Could he but have heard the just revenge upon Sennacherib? Could he be ignorant of his father's supernatural recovery? Could he but see that everlasting monument of the noted degrees in the dial of Ahaz? Could he avoid the sense of those fifteen years which were superadded to his father's age? What one of these proofs doth not evince a Deity? Yet, till his own smart and cure, Manasseh knew not that the Lord was God.

Foolish sinners pay dear for their knowledge; neither will endure to be taught good-cheap: so we have seen resty horses, that will not move till they bleed with the spur; so we have seen

dull and careless children, that will learn nothing but what is put into them with the rod.

The Almighty will be sure to be known for what he is; if not by fair means, yet by foul. If our prosperity and peace and sweet experience of his mercy can win us to acknowledge him, it is more for our ease; but if we will needs be taught by stripes, it is no less for his glory.

Manasseh now returns another man to Jerusalem. With what indignation doth he look upon his old follies! And now all the amends he can make is, to undo what he did; to do that which he undid: *He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord; and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem; and cast them out of the city.* True repentance begins to decline at the ablative; destroying those monuments of shame which former error had reared. The thorns must first be stubbed up ere the ground can be capable of seed. The true method of grace is, first, *Cease to do evil;* then, *Learn to do good.*

In vain had Manasseh professed a repentance, if the strange gods had still held possession of Jerusalem; if the idol had still harboured in God's temple; if foreign altars had still smoked upon the holy mountain. Away with all his trash, when once Manasseh comes to a true sense of piety.

There is nothing but hypocrisy in that penitent, who, after all vows and tears, retains his old abominations. It is that poor piece of satisfaction which we can give to the divine justice, in a hearty indignation to fling down that cup of wickedness wherewith we have been bewitched, and to trample upon the sherds; without which, confession is but wind, and the drops of contrition, water.

The living God loves to dwell clean. He will not come under the roof of idols, nor admit idols to come under his. First therefore Manasseh casts out the strange gods and idols and altars; and then *he repairs the altar of the Lord, and sacrifices thereon peace offerings and thank offerings.* Not till he had pulled down might he build, and when he had pulled down he must build. True repentance is no less active of good. What is it the bettter, if, when the idolatrous altars are defaced, the true God hath not an altar erected to his name? In many altars was superstition, in no altars atheism.

Neither doth penitent Manasseh build God a new altar, but he

repairs the old, which by long disuse lay waste, and was mossy and mouldered with age and neglect. God loves well his own institutions, neither can he abide innovations so much as in the outsides of his services. It is an happy work to vindicate any ordinance of God from the injuries of times, and to restore it to the original glory.

What have our pious governors done other in religion? Had we gone about to lay a new foundation, the work had been accursed; now we have only scraped off some superfluous moss that was grown upon these holy stones; we have cemented some broken pieces; we have pointed some crazy corners with wholesome mortar instead of base clay, wherewith it was disgracefully patched up. The altar is old, it is God's altar; it is not new, not ours. If we have laid one new stone in this sacred building, let it fly in our faces, and beat out our eyes.

On this repaired altar doth Manasseh send up the sacrifices of his peace, of his thankfulness; and doubtless the God of heaven smells a sweet savour of rest. No perfume is so pleasing to God as that which is cast in by a penitent hand.

It had not served the turn, that Manasseh had approached alone to this renewed altar. As his lewd example had withdrawn the people from their God, so now *he commands Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.* Had he been silent, he could not have been unfollowed; every act of greatness is preceptive; but now that religion is made law, what Israelite will not be devout?

The true God hath now no competitor in Judah. All the idols are pulled down; the high places will not be pulled down. An ill guise is easily taken up; it is not so easily left. After a common depravation of religion, it is hard to return unto the first purity: as when a garment is deeply soiled, it cannot without many lavers recover the former cleanness.

JOSIAH'S REFORMATION.

2 Kings xxii, xxiii; 2 Chronicles xxxiv, xxxv.

Yet, if we must alter from ourselves, it is better to be a Manasseh than a Joash. Joash began well, and ended ill; Manasseh began ill, and ended well. His age varied from his youth no less than one man's condition can vary from another's. His posterity succeeded in both. Amon his son succeeded in the sins of Ma-

nasseh's youth; Josiah, his grandchild, succeeded in the virtues of his age.

What a vast difference doth grace make in the same age! Manasseh began his reign at twelve years; Josiah at eight: Manasseh was religiously bred under Hezekiah; Josiah was misnurtured under Amon: and yet Manasseh runs into absurd idolatries; Josiah is holy and devout. The Spirit of God breathes freely, not confining itself to times or means.

No rules can bind the hands of the Almighty. It is in ordinary proof too true a word that was said of old, *Woe be to thee, O land, whose king is a child!* The goodness of God makes his own exceptions. Judah never fared better than in the green years of a Josiah; if we may not rather measure youth and age by government and disposition than by years. Surely thus Josiah was older with smooth cheeks than Manasseh with gray hairs. Happy is the infancy of princes when it falls into the hands of faithful counsellors.

A good pattern is no small help for young beginners. Josiah sets his father David before him, not Amon, not Manasseh. Examples are the best rules for the inexperienced; where their choice is good, the directions are easiest. The laws of God are the ways of David. Those laws were the rule, these ways were the practice. Good Josiah walks in all the ways of his father David.

Even the minority of Josiah was not idle: we cannot be good too early. At eight years it was enough to have his ear open to hear good counsel, to have his eyes and heart open to seek after God; at twelve, he begins to act, and shows well that he hath found the God he sought. Then he addresses himself to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, groves, images, altars, wherewith it was defiled; burning the bones of the idolatrous priests upon their altars; strewing the ashes of the idols upon the graves of them that had sacrificed to them; striving, by those fires and mattocks, to testify his zealous detestation of all idolatry.

The house must first be cleansed ere it can be garnished. No man will cast away his cost upon unclean heaps. So soon as the temple was purged, Josiah bends his thoughts upon the repairing and beautifying of this house of the Lord.

What stir was there in Judah wherein God's temple suffered not? Six several times was it pillaged, whether out of force or will: first, Jehoash king of Judah is fain by the spoil of it to stop the mouth of Hazael; then, Joash king of Israel fills his own

hands with that sacred spoil in the days of Amaziah; after this, Ahaz rifles it for Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria; then Hezekiah is forced to ransack the treasures of it for Sennacherib; yet after, the sacrilege of Manasseh makes that booty of it which his later times endeavoured to restore; and now, lastly, Amon his son neglects the frame, embezzles the furniture of this holy place. The very pile began to complain of age and unrespect. Now comes good Josiah; and in his eighteenth year, when other young gallants would have thought of nothing but pleasure and jollity, takes up the latest care of his father David, and gives order for the repairing of the temple.

The keepers of the door have received the contribution of all faithful Jews for this pious use. The king sends Shaphan the scribe to Hilkiah the priest to sum it up, and to deliver it unto carpenters and masons for so holy a work.

How well doth it beseem the care of a religious prince to set the priests and scribes in hand with reedifying the temple! The command is the king's, the charge is the high priest's, the execution is the workmen's. When the labourers are faithful in doing the work, and the high priest in the directing it, and the king in enjoining it, God's house cannot fail of an happy perfection; but when any of these slacken, the business must needs languish.

How God blesses the devout endeavours of his servants! While Hilkiah was diligently surveying the breaches and the reparation of the temple, he lights upon the Book of the Law. The authentic and original Book of God's Law was by a special charge appointed to be carefully kept within a safe shrine in the sanctuary. In the depraved times of idolatry, some faithful priest, to make sure work, had locked it fast up in some corner of the temple from the reach of all hands, of all eyes; as knowing how impossible it was that divine monument could otherwise escape the fury of profane guiltiness. Some few transcripts there were doubtless, parcels of this sacred book, in other hands; neither doubt I, but as Hilkiah had been formerly well acquainted with this holy volume, now of long time hid, so the ears of good Josiah had been inured to some passages thereof; but the whole body of these awful records, since the late night of idolatrous confusion and persecution, saw no light till now. This precious treasure doth Hilkiah find while he digs for the temple. Never man laboured to the reparation of God's Church, but he met with a blessing more than he looked for.

Hilkiah the priest and Shaphan the scribe do not engross this invaluable wealth into their own hands, nor suppress these more than sacred rolls for their own advantage; but transmit them, first to the ears of the king, then by him to the people. It is not the praise of a good scribe to lay up, but to bring forth, both old and new; and if the priest's lips shall keep knowledge, they keep it to impart, not to smother; *The people shall seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

So soon as the good king hears the words of the Book of the Law, and in special those dreadful threats of judgment denounced against the idolatries of his Judah, he rends his clothes, to show his heart rent with sorrow and fearful expectation of those plagues, and washes his bosom with tears. O gracious tenderness of Josiah! He doth but once hear the law read, and is thus humbled; humbled for his father's sins, for the sins of his people: how many of us after a thousand hammerings of the menaces of God's law upon our guilty souls continue yet insensible of our danger! The very reading of this Law doth thus affect him; the preaching of it stirs not us: the sins of others struck thus deep with him; our own are slighted by us. A soft heart is the best tempered for God: so physicians are wont to like those bodies best which are easiest to work upon: O God, make our clay wax, and our wax pliable to thy hand; so shall we be sure to be free either from sin or from the hurt of sin.

It is no holy sorrow that sends us not to God. Josiah is not moped with a distractive grief or an astonishing fear, but in the height of his passion sends five choice messengers to Huldah the prophetess, to inquire of the Lord for himself, for Judah. It is an happy trouble that drives us to this refuge.

I do not hear any of these courtiers reply to this godly motion of their young king, "Alas, sir, what means this deep perplexity? what needs all this busy inquisition? If your father were idolatrous, what is that to you who have abandoned his sins? If your people were once idolatrous, what is that to you, yea to them, who have expiated these crimes by their repentance? Have you not carefully reformed all those abuses? hath not your happy reformation made an abundant amends for those wrongs? Spare your tears, and save the labour of your messengers. All is well; all shall be well. These judgments are for the obstinate. Had we been still guilty, these fears had been just. Were we still in danger, what had we gained by our conversion?" Rather, as glad

to second the religious cares of their young king, they feed his holy anxieties with a just aggravation of peril, and by their good counsel whet these his zealous desires of a speedy resolution. That state cannot but be happy whose priests and peers are ready, as to suggest, so to cherish and execute the devout projects of their sovereigns.

The grave priest, the learned scribe, the honourable courtiers do not disdain to knock at the door of a prophetess; neither doth any of them say, "It were hard if we should not have as much acquaintance with God as a woman;" but, in an humble acknowledgment of her graces, they come to learn the will of God from her mouth. True piety is modest, and stands not upon terms of reputation in the businesses of God; but willingly honours his gifts in any subject, least of all in itself.

The sex is not more noted in Huldah than the condition. As she was a woman, so a wife, the wife of Shallum. Holy matrimony was no hinderance to her divine revelations. She was at once a prophetess in her college, a housewife in her family. It was never the practice of God to confine his graces to virginity.

At this very time the famous prophet Jeremiah flourished. Some years had he already spent in this public service. Why was not he rather consulted by Josiah? It is not unlike that some prophetical employments called him away at this time from Jerusalem. His presence could not have been balked: purposely, doubtless, doth God cast his message upon the point of that absence, that he might honour the weaker vessel with his divine oracle, and exercise the humility of so great clients. In the answers of God, it is not to be regarded who speaks, but from whom. The injury redounds to God if the weaknesses of the person cause us to undervalue the authority of the function.

As Josiah and his messengers do not depise Huldah because she was a woman, so Huldah doth not flatter Josiah because a king: *Go, tell the man that sent you, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place.* Lo, he that was as god to his subjects is but as man to the prophetess; neither is the message ever the sweeter because it is required by a prince. No circumstance may vary the form of divine truth. Evil must befall Jerusalem and Judah; yea, all the words of that book must alight upon the inhabitants of both.

In how bad a case we may be, and yet think ourselves not safe only, but happy! These Jews had forgotten their old revolts;

and now, having framed themselves to holy courses, promised themselves nothing but peace, when the prophetess foresees and foretells their approaching ruin. Even their old score must be paid, after the opinion of a clear agreement. In vain shall we hope to quit our arrearages by prorogation.

This prophetess had immediate visions from God, yet she must speak out of the book. There was never any revelation from the Lord that crossed his writings. His hand and his tongue agree eternally. If that book have cursed Judah she may not absolve it.

Yet what a gracious mixture was here of mercy with severity; severity to Judah, mercy to Josiah! Judah shall be plagued, and shall become a desolation and a curse; Josiah shall be quietly housed in his grave before this storm fall upon Judah. His eye shall not see what his people shall feel. It is enough that the expectation of these evils afflict him, the sense shall not.

Whence is this indulgence? *Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord.* How happy a thing it is to be a reed unto God's judgments rather than an oak! The meek and gentle reed stoops, and therefore stands; the oak stands stiffly out against the strongest gust, and therefore is turned up by the roots. At least let us lament those sins we have not avoided, and mourn for the sins of others while we hate our own.

He that found himself exempted from this vengeance by his repentance and deep humiliation, would fain find the same way for the deliverance of his people. The same words of the Law therefore that had wrought upon his heart are by him caused to be publicly read in the ears of Judah and Jerusalem. The assembly is universal of priests, prophets, people, both small and great, because the sin was such, the danger was such: that no man may complain to want information, the Law of God sounds in every ear. If our ears be shut to the Law, the sin is ours; but if the Law be shut to our ears, the sin is of our governors. Woe be to them that hide God's book from the people, as they would do ratsbane from the eyes of children! Ignorant souls cannot perish without their murder. There is no fear of knowing too much, there is too much fear of practising too little.

Now if the people do not imitate their king in relenting, they are not worthy to partake with him in his impunity. Howsoever, they shall not want a great example, as of sorrow, so of amendment. Good Josiah stands by the pillar, and solemnly renews his

covenant with his God. The people cannot for shame refuse to second him. Even they that looked for a destruction, yet do not withdraw their obedience. God's children may not be sullen under his corrections, but, whether they expect or feel smart, are no other than dutiful to his awful hand.

As a man that finds he hath done something that might endanger the forfeit of his favour puts himself into some deserving action, whereby he may hope to reendear himself, so doth Josiah here. No endeavour is enough to testify his zeal to that name of God which was so profaned by his people's idolatry. Whatever monuments were yet remaining of wicked paganism, he defaces with indignation. He burns the vessels of Baal, and puts down his Chemarim; destroys the houses of the Sodomites, strews the powder of their idols in the brook Kedron; defiles Topheth; takes away the horses of the sun; burns the chariots of the sun with fire; and omits nothing that might reconcile God, clear Judah, perfect a reformation.

Neither is this care confined to Jerusalem and the neighbouring towns, but stretches itself to the utmost coasts of Josiah's kingdom. Bethel was the infamous seat of the pollution of Israel. It seems the heirs of Jeroboam, who set up his golden calf there, enjoyed it not long. The kings of Judah recovered it to their crown, but it had not yet recovered itself from that ancient infection. Thither doth good Josiah send the unhallowed ashes of Baal's relics, to stain that altar first which he will soon after deface.

The time was, and it was no less than three hundred and fifty years since, that the man of God out of Judah cried against Jeroboam's altar; *O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.* And now is the hour come wherein every of those words shall be accomplished.

It could not but be a great confirmation to Josiah, to see that God so long ago foremarked him for his own, and forenamed him to so zealous a service. All our names are equally foreknown of that Divine Providence, though not forespoken; neither can any act pass from us which was not predetermined in that eternal counsel of the Almighty; neither can any act that is predetermined be unfulfilled upon earth. Intervention of time breaks no squares in the divine decrees. Our purblind eyes see nothing

but that which toucheth their lids, the quick sight of God's prescience sees that as present which is a world off.

According to the prediction, the stench of dead men's bones is a fit perfume to send up from this altar to heaven, whose best sacrifices savoured worse in the nostrils of God; and the blood of the idolatrous sacrificers was a meet oblation to that God who had been dishonoured by their burnt offerings to his base corrivals.

Even that prophet who foretold this had his tomb in Bethel, and that tomb had his inscription. His weakness might not rob him of the honour of his sepulture.

How palpably do these Israelites condemn themselves while they reserve so famous a monument of their own conviction!

It was no prejudice to this holy prophet that his bones lay amongst the sepulchres of idolaters. His epitaph preserved those bones from burning upon that altar which he had accursed. As the lion might not tear his carcass when he died, so now the fury of the multitude may not violate the very bones in his grave. I do not see Josiah save them for relics; I hear him command they shall rest in peace. It is fit the dead bodies of God's saints should be as free from contempt as from superstition.

After the removal of these rites of false worship it is time to bring in the true. Now a solemn passover shall be kept unto the Lord by the charge of Josiah. That Book of the Law sets him the time, place, circumstances, of this sacrament. His zeal so carefully follows it, that, since the days of Samuel, this feast was never so gloriously, so punctually celebrated. Jerusalem is the place, the fourteenth day of the first month is the time; the Levites are the actors; a yearling and a spotless lamb are the provision. No bone of it is broken; the blood is sprinkled upon the doorposts; it is roasted whole, eaten with sour herbs, with bread unleavened; the remainder is consumed by fire. The law, the sacrifices had been in vain, if the passover had been neglected. No true Israelite might want, whether this monument of their deliverance past, or this type of the Messiah to come. Rather than fail, Josiah's bounty shall supply to Judah lambs for their paschal devotion. No alms is so acceptable as that whereby the soul is furthered.

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JOSIAH'S DEATH; WITH THE DESOLATION OF THE TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM.

2 Kings xxiii; 2 Chronicles xxxv, xxxvi.

Josiah hath now happily settled the affairs both of God and the state; and now hath sweet leisure to enjoy himself and his people. His conscience doth not more cheer him at home than his subjects abroad. Never king reigned with more officious piety to God, with more love and applause of men.

But what stability is there in these earthly things? How seldom is excellency in any kind long lived! In the very strength of his age, in the height of his strength, is Josiah withdrawn from the earth; as not without a merciful intention of his glory on God's behalf, so not without some weakness on his own. Pharaoh-nechoh, king of Egypt, comes up to fight against the king of Assyria. What is that to Josiah? Perhaps the Egyptians attempted to pass through the land of Judah towards Carchemish, the seat of his war, but as a neighbour, not as an enemy. Josiah resists him, as neither holding it safe to admit a foreign power into the bosom of his country, nor daring to give so fair an occasion of provoking the Assyrian hostility against him.

The king of Egypt mildly deprecates this enmity. He sends ambassadors to Josiah, saying, *What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not.*

What friend could have said more? what prophet could have advised more holily? Why doth not good Josiah say with himself, "There may be truth in this suggestion. God may have sent this man to be a scourge of mine old enemy, of Ashur. If the hand of the Almighty be in this design, why do I oppose it? The quarrel is not mine: why do I thrust my finger into this flame unbidden? Wherefore should I hazard the effusion of blood upon a harmless passage? Can I hear him plead a command from God, and not inquire into it? How easy is it for me to know the certainty of this pretended commission! Have not I the priests and prophets of God about me? Let me first go and consult his oracle. If God have sent him, and forbidden me, why should my courage carry me against my piety?"

It is strange that the good heart of Josiah could escape these thoughts, these resolutions; yet he, that upon the general threats of God's law against Judah sends messengers to inquire of a prophetess, now, upon these particular threats of danger to himself, speaks not, stirs not. The famous prophet Jeremiah was then living, and Zephaniah, besides a whole college of seers. Josiah doth not so much as send out of doors to ask, "Shall I go up against the king of Egypt?" Sometimes both grace and wit are asleep in the holiest and wariest breasts. The best of all God's saints may be sometimes miscarried by their passions to their cost.

The wise providence of God hath mercifully determined to leave Josiah to his own counsels, that by the weakness of his servant he might take occasion to perfect his glory. Even that wherein Josiah was wanting unto God shall concur to the making up of God's promise to Josiah. When we are the most blindfolded we run on the ways of God's hidden decrees; and, whatever our intents be, cannot, if we would, go out of that unknown path.

Needs will Josiah put himself into arms against an unwilling enemy, and, to be less noted, disguises himself. The fatal arrow of an Egyptian archer finds him out in the throng, and gives him his death's-wound. Now, too late, he calls to a retreat. His changed chariot is turned to a bier, to carry his bleeding corpse to his grave in Jerusalem.

What eye doth not now pity and lament the untimely end of a Josiah? Whom can it choose but affect, to see a religious, just, virtuous prince snatched away in the vigour of his age? After all our foolish moan, the providence that directed that shaft to his lighting place intends that wound for a stroke of mercy. The God whom Josiah serves looks through his death at his glory; and by this sudden violence will deliver him from the view and participation of the miseries of Judah, which had been many deaths; and fetches him to the participation of that happiness which could countervail more deaths than could be incident into a Josiah. O the wonderful goodness of the Almighty, whose very judgments are merciful! O the safe condition of God's children, whom very pain easeth, whom death revives, whom dissolution unites, whom, lastly, their very sin and temptation glorifies!

How happily hath Josiah gained by this change! Instead of a froward people, he now is sorted with saints and angels;

instead of a fading and corruptible crown, he now enjoys an eternal.

The orphan subjects are ready to weep out their eyes for sorrow. Their loss cannot be so great as his gain. He is glorious; they, as their sins had deserved, miserable. If the separated soul could be capable of passion, could Josiah have seen after his departure the calamities of his sons, of his people, it could not but have laid siege to his peace.

The sad subjects proclaim his son Jehoahaz king instead of so lamented a father. He both doth ill and fares ill. By that time he hath sat but three months in the throne, Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt seconds the father's death with the son's captivity. This victorious enemy puts down the wicked son of Josiah, and lades him with chains at Riblath in the land of Hamath, and lades his people with a tribute of an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold; yet, as if he that was unwilling to fight with Josiah were no less unwilling to root out his posterity, this Egyptian sets Eliakim, the second son of Josiah, upon the seat of his father, and, that he might be all his, changes his name to Jehoiakim. O the woful and unworthy succession of Josiah! one son is a prisoner, the other is a tributary; both are wicked.

After that Jehoiakim hath been some years Pharaoh's bailiff, to gather and rack the dear rents of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar the great king of Babylon comes up, and sweeps away both the lord and his feodary, Pharaoh and Jehoiakim. So far was the ambitious Egyptian from maintaining his encroachment upon the territories of Judah, that he could not now hold his own. From Nilus to Euphrates all is lost. So subject are the lesser powers still to be swallowed up of the greater. So just it is with God, that they which will be affecting undue enlargement of their estates should fall short of what they had.

Jehoiakim is carried in fetters to Babylon; and now, in that dungeon of his captivity, hath more leisure than grace to bethink himself of all his abominations, and while he inherits the sad lodging of his great-grandfather Manasseh, inherits not his success.

While he is rotting in this gaol, his young son Jehoiachim starts up in his throne, like to a mushroom, that rises up in a night and withers in a day. Within three months and ten days is that young prince, the meet son of such a father, fetched up in irons to his father's prison.

Neither shall he go alone. His attendance shall add to his

misery. His mother, his wives, his officers, his peers, his craftsmen, his warriors accompany him, manacled and chained, to their perpetual bondage.

Now according to Isaiah's word, it would have been great preferment for the fruit of Hezekiah's loins to be pages in the court of Babylon.

One only branch yet remains of the unhappy stock of holy Josiah, Mattaniah, the brother of Jehoiakim; whom Nebuchadnezzar, changing his name to Zedekiah, sets up in that forlorn and tributary throne. There might he have lived, though an underling, yet peaceable. This man, to make up the measure of God's just judgments, as he was ever a rebel to God, so proves rebellious to his sovereign master the king of Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah hath forewarned him in vain. Nothing could teach this man but smart.

Who can look for other than fury from Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem; which now had affronted him with three several successions of revolts and conspiracies against his government, and thrice abused his bounty and indulgence? With a mighty army doth he therefore come up against his seditious deputy, and besieges Jerusalem, and blocks it up with forts round about. After two years' siege, the Chaldees without and the famine within have prevailed. King Zedekiah and his soldiers are fled away by night, as thinking themselves happy if they might abandon their walls and save their lives.

The Chaldees, as caring more for the birds than for the nest, pursue them, and overtake Zedekiah, forsaken of all his forces, in the plain of Jericho, and bring him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

What can so unthankful and perfidious a vassal expect but the worst of revenge? The sentence is fearful; first, the sons of Zedekiah are slain before his eyes; then those eyes of his, as if they had seen enough when they had seen him childless, are put out. His eyes are only lent him so long as to torment him with the sight of his own utmost discomfort. Had his sons but overlived his eyes, the grief had been so much the less as the apprehension of it had been less lively and piercing; now this woful object shall shut up his sight; that even when his bodily eyes are gone, yet the eyes of his mind might ever see what he last saw; that thus his sons might be ever dying before him, and himself in their death ever miserable.

Who doth not now wish that the blood of Hezekiah and Josiah could have been severed from these impure dregs of their lewd issue? No man could pity the offenders, were it not for the mixture of the interest of so holy progenitors.

No more sorrow can come in at the windows of Zedekiah; more shall come in at his doors. His ears shall receive what more to rue for his Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the great marshal of the king of Babylon, comes up against that deplored city, and breaks down the walls of it round about, and burns the temple of the Lord, and the king's house, and every fair palace of Jerusalem with fire, drives away the remainder of her inhabitants into captivity, carries away the last spoils of the glorious temple.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the wonder of all times, the paragon of nations, the glory of the earth, the favourite of heaven, how art thou now become heaps of ashes, hills of rubbish, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin! If later, yet no less deep, hast thou now pledged that bitter cup of God's vengeance to thy sister Samaria. How carefully had thy God forewarned thee! *Though Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah sin.* Lo now, as thine iniquities, so thy judgments have overtaken her. Both lie together in the dust, both are made a curse to all posterities. O God, what place shall thy justice spare if Jerusalem have perished? If that delight of thine were cut off for her wickedness, *let us not be high minded, but fear.*

What pity it was to see those goodly cedars of the temple flaming up higher than they stood in Lebanon? to see those curious marbles, which never felt the dent of the pickaxe or hammer in the laying, wounded with mattocks, and wounding the earth in their fall! to see the holy of holies whereinto none might enter but the high priest once a year, thronged with pagans; the veils rent, the sacred ark of God violated and defaced, the tables overturned, the altars broken down, the pillars demolished, the pavements digged up, yea the very ground, where that famous pile stood, deformed! O God, thou wouldst rather have no visible house upon earth than endure it defiled with idolatries.

Four hundred thirty and six years had that temple stood, and beautified the earth, and honoured heaven; now it is turned into rude heaps. There is no prescription to be pleaded for the favour of the Almighty. Only that temple, not made with hands, is eternal in the heavens. Thither he graciously brings us that hath ordained us thither, for the sake of that glorious High Priest that hath once for all entered into that holy of holies, Amen.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK XXI.

ZERUBBABEL AND EZRA.—Ezra i–x.

The first transportation into Babylon under Jehoiakim, wherein Daniel, Ezekiel, and many other of the best note were driven into captivity, was, some eleven years after, followed with a second under Zedekiah, wherein the remnant of the now ruined Jerusalem and Judah were swept away.

Seventy years was the period of their longest servitude. While Babylon was a queen, Judah was her vassal: when that proud tyranness fell, God's people began to rise again. The Babylonian monarchy was no sooner swallowed up of the Persian, than the Jews felt the comfort of liberty: for Cyrus conquering Babylon, and finding the Jews groaning under that captivity, straight releases them, and sends them, under the conduct of their captain Zerubbabel, back to their almost forgotten country.

The world stands upon vicissitudes. Every nation hath her turn, and must make up her measure. Threescore and ten years ago it was the course of Judah, the iniquity of that rebellious people was full: some hundred and thirty years before that, was the turn of Samaria and her Israelites; now the staff is come to the doors of Babylon, even that wherewith Judah was beaten; and those Persians which are now victorious must have their term also. It is in vain for any earthly state to promise to itself an immutable condition. At last the rod that scourged God's children is cast into the fire: *Thou hast remembered, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem: how they said, Down with it, down with it, even to the ground: O daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery: how happy is he that rewardeth thee as thou hast served them!* It is Cyrus that hath wrought this revenge, this rescue.

Doubtless it did not a little move Cyrus to this favour that he found himself honourably forenamed in these Jewish prophecies, and foreappointed to this glorious service, no less than an hundred and seventy years before he was (Is. xliv. 28). Who would not

be glad to make good so noble and happy a destiny? O God, if we hear that thou hast ordained us to life, how gladly, how carefully should we work out our salvation! if to good works, how should we abound!

In the first year of his monarchy doth Cyrus both make proclamations and publish them in writing through all his kingdom; wherein he both professeth his zealous resolutions and desires to build up God's house in Jerusalem, and enjoins and encourages all the Jews through his dominions to address themselves to that sacred work, and incites all his subjects to aid them with silver, and gold, and goods, and beasts. How gracious was the command of that whereof the very allowance was a favour!

Was it Cyrus that did this? Was it not thou, O God, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, that stirredst up the spirit of that Persian, as if he had been more than a son of thy Church, a father? How easy is it for thee to make very pagans protectors to thy Church; enemies, benefactors!

Not with an empty grace doth this great king dismiss the Jews, but with a royal bounty: he brings forth *the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;* and causes them to be numbered by his treasurer to the hands of Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah, for the use of the temple; no fewer than five thousand and four hundred vessels of gold and silver.

Certainly this great monarch wanted not wit to think, "It is a rich booty that I find in the temples of Babylon: by the law of conquest it is mine; having vanquished their gods, I may well challenge their spoil. How seasonably doth it now fall into my hands, upon this victory to reward my soldiers, to settle my new empire! What if this treasure came from Jerusalem? The propriety[a] is now altered; the very place, according to the conceit of the Jews, hath profaned it. The true God, I have heard, is curious; neither will abide those vessels which have been polluted with idolatrous uses. It shall be enough if I loose the bonds of this miserable people. If I give liberty, let the next give wealth. They will think themselves happy in bare walls in their native earth. To what purpose should I pamper their penury with a sudden store."

But the princely heart of Cyrus would admit of no such base sacrilegious thoughts. Those vessels that he finds stamped with God's mark he will return to their owner. Neither his own oc-

[a] [property, proprietorship.]

casions nor their abuse shall be any colour of their detention. O Cyrus, how many close-handed gripple-minded Christians shall once be choked in judgment with the example of thy just munificence! Thou restoredst that which we purloin. Woe be to those houses that are stored with the spoils of God's temple! Woe be to those fingers that are tainted with holy treasures!

Kings can hardly do good alone. Their laws are not more followed than their examples. No sooner do the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites set their faces towards Jerusalem for the building of the temple, than the liberal hands of their pagan neighbours furnish them with gold and silver and precious things. Every Persian is glad to be at the charge of laying a stone in God's house. The same God that had given them these metals out of his coffers of the earth gives it out of their coffers to his temple. He that took away by the Chaldees gives by the Persians. Where the Almighty intends a work, there cannot be any want of means.

Thus heartened, thus laded, do the joyful families of Judah return to their old home. How many thousands of them were worn out and lost in that seventy years' servitude! how few of them yet survived that could know the place of their birth and habitation, or say, "Here stood the temple, here the palace!"

Amongst those forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore Jews[b] that returned in this first expedition, there were whom the confusion of their long captivity had robbed of their pedigree. They knew themselves Jews, but could not derive their line. These were yet admitted without difficulty; but those of the priestly tribe which could not deduce their genealogy from the register are cashiered as unclean.

Then God would be served in a blood; now in a due succession. If we could not fetch the line of our pedigree from Christ and his apostles, we were not fit for the evangelical altars. Their calling was by nature, ours by grace; the grace of inward abilities, of outward ordination: if we cannot approve both these, we are justly abandoned.

Now had the children of Israel taken down their harps from the willows which grew by the waters of Babylon, and could, unbidden, sing the true songs of their recovered Sion.

They are newly settled in their old mansions; when, upon the first public feast in the autumn immediately following their re-

[b] Besides servants 7337.

turn, they flock up to Jerusalem. Their first care is their public sacrifice. That school of their captivity, wherein they have been long trained, hath taught them to begin with God. A forced discontinuance makes devotion more savoury, more sweet, to religious hearts; whereas in an open freedom piety doth too often languish.

Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the prince are fitly joined in the building of the altar; neither of their hands may be out of that sacred work. No sooner is that set upon the bases than it is employed to the daily burnt offerings. The altar may not stay the leisure of the temple. God's Church may not want her oblations. He can be none of the sons of Israel that doth not every day renew his acknowledgments of God.

How feelingly do these Jews keep their Feast of Tabernacles, while their sojourning in Babylon was still in their thoughts; while as yet their tents must supply their ruined houses! The first motions of zeal are commonly strong and fervent.

How carefully do these governors and priests make preparation for God's temple! Carpenters and masons are hired. Tyrian workmen are again called for, and Lebanon is now anew solicited for cedar trees.

The materials are ready. Every Israelite with such courage addresses himself to this service as if his life lay in those stones. And now, while the foundation of the temple was laying, the priests stand in their habits with trumpets, the Levites with cymbals, interchanging their holy music, and melodiously singing praises to the God of Israel, who had turned their captivity as the streams in the south, and honoured their eyes and hands with the first stones of his house. The people second their songs with shouts. The earth sounds and heaven rings with the joyful acclamations of the multitude.

It is no small comfort in a good action to have begun well. The entrance of any holy enterprise is commonly encountered with many discouragements, which if we have once overcome, the passage is smooth.

How would these men have shouted at the laying on of the last stone of the battlements who are thus joyed with laying the first stones of the foundation! The end of any thing is better than the beginning; that hath certainty, this danger; this labour, that rest. Little did these men think that, for all this, few of them should live to see the roof.

What different affections shall we see produced in men by the same occasion! The younger Jews shouted at this sight, the elder wept. The younger shouted to see a new foundation, the elder wept to remember the old. They who had seen no better thought this goodly, they who had seen the former thought this mean and homely: more sorrowing for what they had lost than rejoicing in so unequal a reparation.

As it may fall out, it is some piece of misery to have been happier. Every abatement of the degrees of our former height lays siege to our thankfulness for lesser mercies. Sometimes it proves an advantage to have known no better. He shall more comfortably enjoy present benefits who takes them as they are, without any other comparisons than of the weakness of his own deservings. It is nothing to me what myself or others have been, so I be now well. Neither is it otherwise in particular churches; if one be more gloriously built than another, yet if the foundation be rightly laid in both, one may not insult, the other may not repine: each must congratulate the truth to other; each must thankfully enjoy itself.

The noise was not more loud than confused. Here was a discordant mixture of lamentation and shouting. It was hard to say whether drowned the other.

This assembly of Jews was a true image of God's Church on earth; one sings, another cries; never doth it all either laugh or mourn at once. It shall be in our triumph that all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; till then, our passions must be mixed, according to the occasions.

The Jews are busy at work; not more full of joy than hopes: and now that the walls begin to overlook the earth, their thoughts seem to overlook the walls. But what great enterprise was ever set on foot for God which found not some crosses?

There was a mongrel brood of Samarit-Assyrians, which ever since the days of Sennacherib dwelt in the land of Israel, whose religion was a patched coat of several shreds, some little part Jewish, the rest pagan, not without much variety of idolatry.

These hollow neighbours proffer their assistance to the Children of the Captivity: *Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and do sacrifice to him.* Might men be their own judges, there would be no heresy in the world, no misworship. It is true, these men did sacrifice to the true God. The lions taught them to seek, and the Israelitish priest taught them to

find, the fashions of the God of the land. Some of these Jews knew their devotion of old. They served Israel's God, but with their own. As good no God as too many.

In a just indignation therefore do these Jewish governors repel the partnership of such helpers: *You have nothing to do with us, to build an house to our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel.* The hand of an idolater is contagious. Yet, had it been to the building of some fortress or common-hall, perhaps their aid had not been refused; but when the walls of God's house are to be raised, this society had been piacular.

Those that may not be allowed to help the work will ask no leave to hinder it; their malicious suggestions weaken the hands of the people of Judah, and stir up authority to suppress them.

Cyrus was far off; neither lived he long after that gracious commission; and besides was so taken up the while with his wars, that he could not have leisure to sift those querulous accusations. Now therefore during the last years of Cyrus, and the reign of his son Cambyses, and the long government of Darius Hystaspides, and of his son Xerxes or Ahasuerus, and lastly of his son Artaxerxes, until the days of Darius Nothus, which was no less than five successions of kings besides Cyrus, do the walls of the temple stand still, yea lie waste; subject to the wrongs of time and weather; the fit matter of sorrow to the Jews, insultation to the enemies, derision to passengers.

What a wide gap of time was here betwixt the foundation of God's house and the battlements! How large a trial doth God now secondly take of the faith, of the patience, of his people! How large a proof doth he give of his own longsuffering! O God, when thou hadst but one house upon earth, thou wert content to put up delays, yea affronts, in the building of it; now thou hast many, it is no marvel if thy longanimity and justice abide some of them to lie desolate. They are not stones, nor metals nor men, that can make thee more glorious; thou best knowest when to serve thyself of all these, when to honour these with thy service.

A small matter hinders the worthiest action; as a little fish, they say, stays the greatest ship. Before, the Jews were discouraged with words; but now, they are stopped by commands.

These envious Samaritans have corrupted the governors which the Persian kings set over those parts, and from their hands have

obtained letters of deep calumniation to Ahasuerus the king; and after him to his son Artaxerxes: wherein Jerusalem is charged with old rebellion to kings; and for proof, appellation is made to the records; from which evidence is spitefully inferred, that if these walls be once built, the king shall receive no tribute on this side the river. Never was God's Church but subject to reproaches.

Princes have reason to be jealous of their rights. The records are searched. It soon appears, that within one century of years Jerusalem had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and held out two years' siege of that great Babylonian. The scandal of disloyalty is perpetual, although indeed they held him rather a prevailing enemy than a lawful sovereign. One act disparages either place or person to all posterities. Therefore shall the walls of Jerusalem lie waste because it had once been treacherous. After an hundred years doth that city rue one perfidious act of Zedekiah. Fidelity to our governors is ever both safe and honourable.

Command is now sent out from Artaxerxes[c], even the son of queen Esther, to restrain the work. All respects must cease with carnal minds when their honours and profits are in question. Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe come now armed with authority. The sword hath easily prevailed against the trowel. Still do the Jews find themselves, as it were, captives at home, and in silence and sorrow cease from their labours until the days of the next successor, Darius Nothus.

As those that had learned to sow after a bad crop, these Jews, upon the change of the prince, by the encouragement of the prophets of God, Haggai and Zechariah, take new heart to build again. If others' power hinder us in the work of God, our will may not be guilty.

Their new governors come as before to expostulate; "*Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?* and what are your names?" They wisely and modestly plead the service of the God of heaven, the decree of Cyrus; still persisting to build, as if the prohibition of Artaxerxes had died with the author.

The unpartial governors do neither claw nor exasperate; but, relating the humble and just answer of the Jews, move the king that search may be made in the rolls of Babylon, whether such an edict were made by Cyrus; and require his royal pleasure

[c] Surnamed Long-hand.

concerning the validity of such a pretended decree. Darius searches, finds, ratifies, enlargeth it; not only charging his officers not to hinder the work, but commanding to levy sums of his own tribute beyond the river, for the expenses of the building, for the furnishing of sacrifices; threatening utter ruin to the house of that man and death to his person who should offer to impeach this bounty; and shutting up with a zealous imprecation: *The God of heaven, that hath caused his name to dwell there, destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God, which is at Jerusalem: I, Darius, have made a decree; let it be done with speed.*

Who would have looked for such an edict from a Persian? No Solomon, no David, could have said more. The Ruler of all hearts makes choice of his own instruments; and, when he pleaseth, can glorify himself by those means which are least expected. That sacred work which the husband and son of an Esther crossed shall be happily accomplished by a Darius.

In the sixth year of his reign is the temple of God fully finished; and now the dedication of it is celebrated by a joyful feast. An hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, in a meet proportion, smoke upon their altars. And now the children of the captivity think this day a sufficient payment for all their sorrows. We have reason to think it the fairest day that ever shone forth to us wherein the spiritual building of God's house is raised up in our souls. How should we shout at the laying of this foundation, and feast at the laying on of the roof! What other, what better sacrifice can we offer up to God in the sense of our joy, than ourselves? Let our hearts be at once the temple, the altar, the sacrifice. O God, be thou glorified in all these, who hast graciously honoured all these with thyself.

Every holy feast is now duly kept; the priests know their divisions, the Levites their courses; and the whole service of God is put into a settled order. But, as there can be no new beginnings without imperfection, nor long continuance without corruption, reformation is no less necessary than good institutions.

Artaxerxes Mnemon[d] had learned of his father Darius to befriend God's people, and strives to inherit his beneficence. Under his government is Ezra, the priest and learned scribe, sent with a large commission from Babylon to Jerusalem, to inquire into the wants and redress the disorders of the Jews; with

[d] the mindful.

full power, not only to carry with him all the voluntaries of his nation, and the treasures contributed in all the province of Babylon, but to raise such sums out of the king's revenues as should be found requisite; and withal to ordain magistrates and judges, and to crown the laws with due execution, whether to death or banishment or confiscation; and lastly, with a large exemption of the priests and Levites, and all the inferior officers of the temple, from all tolls, tributes, customs. Nothing wanted here, whether for direction or encouragement. It is a sign of God's great favour to any nation when the hearts of sovereign governors are raised up, both to the choice of worthy agents, and to the commanding of pious and restorative actions.

Holy and careful Ezra gathers a new colony of Jews; takes view of them at the river of Ahava; and finding a miss of the sons of Levi (without whom no company, no plantation can be complete), sends for their supply; and now, fully furnished, he proclaims a fast in the way.

I do not hear him say, "The journey is long and dangerous. The people have need of all their strength. I could well wish us all afflicted with a religious fast, were it not that the abatement of the courage and vigour of the multitude may endanger our success." But without all these carnal consultations, he begins with this solemn act of humiliation. It is better to have God strong in our weakness, than to have flesh and blood strong in His neglect.

Artaxerxes was a patron of the Jews, yet a pagan by profession. Wise Ezra was afraid of quenching those sparks of piety which he descried in this semi-proselyte. Rather therefore than he will seem to imply a distrust in the providence of that God in whose service he went, by seeking a convoy of soldiers from the king, Ezra chooses to put himself upon the hazard of the way, and the immediate protection of the Almighty. Any death were better than to hear Artaxerxes say, "Is this the man that so confidently told me, *The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him?* Doth he believe himself, that he thus doubts ere he begin? Dare he not trust his God with his own businesses?"

The resolutions of faithful hearts are heroical. No heathen man shall stumble at Ezra's fear. He can find more assurance in his fast than in a Persian band. With a courageous reliance

upon the hand of his God, he puts himself into the journey; and finds nothing but safety and success. The fidelity of the Almighty never disappointed the confidence of his servants. All the army of Artaxerxes could not have been so strong a guard to the Jews as their invisible protection.

In the space of four months is Ezra and his company happily arrived at Jerusalem, where he joys to see the new temple and his old colleagues: and now, having delivered up the charge of his treasure by weight in the chambers of the house of the Lord, he applies himself to his work, and delivers the king's commission to the lieutenants and governors for their utmost assistance.

The princes of Judah do not, for aught I hear, repine at the large patent granted to this priest, nor say, "What doth a man of this robe meddle with placing or displacing magistrates? with executions of judgments to death, bonds, banishment?" But rather, as congratulating this power to sacred hands, gladly present unto him all their grievances. Truly religious hearts cannot grudge any honour to their spiritual guides.

This holy commissioner is soon welcomed with a sad bill of complaint from some good peers of Israel; wherein they charge divers of the priests, Levites, people, not to have separated themselves from the idolatrous inhabitants of the lands, nor therefore from their abominations, even from Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, and the rest of those branded nations; that they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with those forbidden people; and (which made the matter so much more heinous, less remediable) that *the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.*

O hypocritical Jews, did ye refuse to suffer your Samaritan neighbours to join with you in building a lifeless house unto God, and do ye now join affinity with a more accursed generation for the building of living houses unto posterity? for the pulling down of the lively house of God!

How could Ezra hear this with his clothes, his hair, his beard untorn? What grief, what astonishment must this news needs bring to a zealous heart? And were it not that the conscience of his sincere respect to God's glory relieved him, how could Ezra choose but repent of his journey, and say, "Am I come from Babylon to find paganism in Judah? Did I leave Persians to meet with Canaanites? What do I here if Jerusalem

be removed? How much better were a clear captivity than an idolatrous freedom? Woe is me, that having left many Jewish hearts in Babylon, I now am forced to find heathen blood in Jerusalem."

As a man distracted with sorrow, Ezra sits down upon the earth, with his garments rent, with the hair of his head and beard plucked off, wringing his hands, knocking his breast, not moving from his place until the evening sacrifice. It is hard to be too much affected with the public sins of God's people. Those who find themselves in the ship of God's Church cannot but be much troubled with every dangerous leak that it takes. Common cases are not more neglected by the careless than taken to heart by the wise and godly.

There and thus Ezra sits astonied until the evening sacrifice. Others resorted to him the while, even all that trembled at the words of the God of Israel; but to help on his sorrow, not to relieve; neither doth any man wish a mitigation of his own or others' grief.

At last he rises up from his heaviness, and casts himself upon his knees, and spreads out his hands unto the Lord his God. Wherefore was all that pensiveness, fasting, silence, tearing of hair and clothes, but to serve as a meet preface to his prayers? wherein he so freely pours out his heart, as if it had been all dissolved into devotion; professing his shame to lift up his face towards the throne of God; confessing the iniquities of his people, which were increased over their heads, and grown up unto heaven; fetching their trespass far, and charging them deep; feelingly acknowledging the just hand that had followed them in all their judgments, and the just confusion wherein they now stand before the face of their God.

Tears and sighs and grovellings accompanied his prayers; the example and noise whereof drew Israel into a participation of this public mourning, *For the people wept very sore.* How can they choose but think, "If he thus lament for us, how should we grieve for ourselves?"

All Judah went away merrily with their sin till this check of Ezra: now they are afflicted. Had not the hands of the peers been in this trespass, the people had not been guilty: had not the cheeks of Ezra been first drenched with tears, the people had not been penitent. It cannot be spoken what power there is in a great example, whether to evil or good.

Prayers and tears are nothing without endeavours. Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel, puts the first life into this business. Having seconded the complaint of Ezra, he now adds, *Yet there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them. Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee; we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.*

When mischief is once done, the chief care is how to redress it. The best way of redress is, the deliberate undoing of that which we have rashly committed. The surest obligation to the undoing of an evil act is an oath or covenant made with God for the performance.

There is no man so wise but he may make use of good counsel. There is no man so forward but he may abide incitation. It is no small encouragement to see an hearty assistance in an envious and difficult service: *Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word.*

It is half done that is thus assured. There was need of a strong power to dissolve a matrimonial though inordinate love. Doubtless these men had married out of affection. Their hearts were no less set upon these wives, though heathenish, than if they had been of their own tribes; neither were their children, thus begotten, less dear unto them than if they had lain in Jewish wombs. Nothing less than an oath of God therefore could quit these passions; that is both required and taken.

Now begins Ezra to conceive some hope of present redress, the comfort whereof yet cannot turn off his sorrow for the offence past: he neither eats bread nor drinks water, willingly punishing himself because Israel had sinned. Now shall his countrymen easily read in his face their own penance and just humiliation, and say, "This man takes no joy in our sufferings; he would not smart thus for us, if he did not descry more danger towards us than we can apprehend."

Proclamation is made through Judah and Jerusalem, under pain of forfeiture of substance, and excommunication from God's people, that all the children of the captivity should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem. They are met accordingly.

The courts of God's house are thronged with penitents; and now, as if the heaven would teach them what to do, the clouds rain down abundance of tears. What with those sad showers,

what with their inward remorse, the people sit trembling in the open courts, and humbly wait for the reproof, for the sentence of Ezra. He rises up, and with a severe countenance lays before them their sin, their amends: the sin of their strange wives, the amends of their confession, of their separation; not sparing to search their wound, not neglecting the meet plaister for their cure. The people, as willing to be healed, yield themselves patiently to that rough hand, not shrinking at the pain, not favouring the sore; *As thou hast said, so must we do;* only craving a fit proportion of time and a due assistance for the despatch of so long and important a work.

Ezra gladly hearkens to this, not so much request as counsel of Israel. The charge is divided to men and days. For two months' space the commissioners sit close, and within that compass finish this business, not more thankless than necessary.

Doubtless much variety of passion met with them in this busy service. Here you should have seen an affectionate husband bitterly weeping at the dismission of a loving wife, and drowning his last farewell in sobs: there you might have seen a passionate wife hanging upon the arms of her beloved husband, and on her knees conjuring him by his former vows and the dear pledges of their loves, and proffering with many tears to redeem the loss of her husband with the change of her religion. Here you might have seen the kindred and parents of the dismissed shutting up their denied suits with rage and threats: there the abandoned children kneeling to their seemingly cruel father, beseeching him not to cast off the fruit of his own loins, and expostulating what they have offended in being his. The resolved Israelites must be deaf or blind to these moving objects, and so far forget nature, as to put off part of themselves. Personal inconveniences have reason to yield to public mischiefs. Long entertainment makes that sin hard to be ejected whose first motions might have been repelled with ease.

Had not the prohibition of these marriages been express, and their danger and mischief palpable, the care of their separation had not bred so much tumult in Israel. He that ordained matrimony had upon fearful curses forbidden an unequal yoke with infidels. Besides the marring of the Church by the mixture of an unholy seed, religion suffered for the present, and all good hearts with it. Many tears, many sacrifices, need to expiate so foul an offence, and to set Israel straight again.

All this while, even these mesline Jews were yet forward to build the temple. The worst sinners may yield an outward conformity to actions of piety. Ezra hath done more service in pulling down than the Jews in building: without this act the temple might have stood, religion must needs have fallen; Babel had been translated to Jerusalem, Jews had turned Gentiles. O happy endeavours of devout and holy Ezra, that hath at once restored Judah to God and to itself!

NEHEMIAH BUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

Nehemiah i, ii, iii, iv.

Thirteen years were now passed since Ezra's going up to Jerusalem; when Nehemiah, the religious courtier of Artaxerxes, inquires of the estate of his country and brethren of Judea.

He might well find that holy scribe had not been idle. The commission of Artaxerxes had been improved by him to the utmost. Disorders were reformed, but the walls lay waste; the temple was built, but the city was ruinous; and if some streets were repaired, yet they stood unguarded, open to the mercy of an enemy, to the infestation of ill neighbourhood. Great bodies must have slow motions; as Jerusalem, so the Church of God, whose type it was, must be finished by leisure.

Nehemiah sat warm in the court at Shushan favoured by the great king Artaxerxes. Nothing could be wanting to him, whether for pleasure or state. What needed he to trouble his head with thoughts for Jerusalem? what if those remote walls lay on heaps while himself dwelt fair? what if his far distant countrymen be despised, while himself is honoured by the great monarch of the world? It is not so easy for gracious dispositions to turn off the public calamities of God's Church; neither can they do other than lose their private felicities in the common distresses of the universal body: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.*

Many Jews went up from Babylon and Shushan to Jerusalem; few ever returned voluntarily from their native home to the region of their captivity. Some occasion drew Hanani, with certain others of Judah, to this voyage. Of them doth Nehemiah carefully inquire the present condition of Jerusalem. It was no news that the people were afflicted and reproached, the walls broken

down, the gates burnt with fire. Ever since the furious devastation of Nebuzaradan, that city knew not better terms. Seldom when doth the spiritual Jerusalem fare otherwise in respect of outward estate? External glory and magnificence is an unsure note of the Church.

Well had Nehemiah hoped that the gracious edict and beneficence of Darius, and the successive patronage of his lord Artaxerxes, had, by the continuance of twenty years' favour, advanced the strength and glory of Jerusalem; but now, finding the holy city to lie still in the dust of her confusion, neglected of God, despised of men, he sits down, and weeps and mourns and fasts, and prays to the God of heaven. How many saw those ruins and were little affected! he hears of them afar off, and is thus passionate. How many were upon this sight affected with a fruitless sorrow! his mourning is joined with the endeavours of redress. In vain is that grief which hath no other end than itself.

Nehemiah is resolved to kneel to the king his master for the repair of his Jerusalem. He dares not attempt the suit till he have begun with God. This good courtier knew well that the hearts of these earthly kings are in the overruling hand of the King of heaven, to incline whither he pleaseth. Our prayers are the only true means to make way for our success. If in all our occasions we do not begin with the First Mover, the course is preposterous, and commonly speeds thereafter.

Who dares censure the piety of courtiers, when he finds Nehemiah standing before Artaxerxes? Even the Persian palace is not uncapable of a saint. No man that waits on the altar at Jerusalem can compare for zeal with him that waits on the cup of a pagan monarch. The mercies of God are unlimited to places, to callings.

Thus armed with devotions doth Nehemiah put himself into the presence of his master Artaxerxes. His face was overclouded with a deep sadness, neither was he willing to clear it. The king easily notes the disparity of the countenance of the bearer and the wine that he bears, and in a gracious familiarity asks the reason of such unwonted change. How well it becomes the great to stoop unto a courteous affability, and to exchange words of respect even with their humble vassals!

Nehemiah had not been so long in the court but he knew that princes like no other than cheerful attendants; neither was he

wont to bring any other face into that presence than smooth and smiling.

Greatness uses to be full of suspicion; and where it sees a dejection and sourness of the brows, is ready to apprehend some sullen thoughts of discontentment, or at the least construes it for a disrespect to that sovereignty whose beams should be of power to disperse all our inward mists.

Even good manners forbid a man to press into the presence of a prince, except he can either lay by these unpleasing passions or hide them. So had Nehemiah hitherto done; now he purposely suffers his sorrow to look through his eyes, that it may work both inquiry and compassion from his master; neither doth he fail of his hopes in either: *Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?* How sensible do we think the Father of mercies is of all our pensive thoughts, when a heathen master is so tender of a servant's grief! How ready should our tongues be to lay open our cares to the God of all comfort, when we see Nehemiah so quick in the expressions of his sorrow to an uncertain ear!

Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof burnt with fire? Not without an humble preface doth Nehemiah lay forth his grievance. Complaints have ever an unpleasing harshness in them, which must be taken off by some discreet insinuation; although it could not but sound well in the generous ear of Artaxerxes that his servant was so careful for the honour of his country. As nature hath made us all members of a community, and hath given us common interests, so it is most pleasing to us to see these public cares divide us from our own.

The king easily descries a secret supplication wrapt up in this moanful answer, which the modest suitor was afraid to disclose; and therefore he helps that bashful motion into the light: *For what dost thou make request?* It is the praise of bounty to draw on the just petitions of fearful suppliants.

Nehemiah dares not open his mouth to the king till his heart hath opened itself by a sudden ejaculation to his God. No business can be so hasty but our prayer may prevent it; the wings whereof are so nimble that it can fly up to heaven, and solicit God, and bring down an answer before ever our words need to come forth of our lips. In vain shall we hope that any design of ours can prosper, if we have not first sent this messenger on our errand.

After this silent and insensible preparation, Nehemiah moves his suit to the king; yet not at once, but by meet degrees. First, he craves leave for his journey and for building; then he craves aid for both. Both are granted. Nehemiah departs, furnished with letters to the governors for a convoy; with letters to the keeper of the king's forest for timber; not more full of desire than hope.

Who ever put his hand to any great work for the behoof of God's Church without opposition? As the walls of the temple found busy enemies, so shall the walls of the city; and these so much more as they promise more security and strength to Jerusalem. Sanballat the deputy-lieutenant of the Moabites, and Tobiah the like officer to the Ammonites, and Geshem to the Arabians, are galled with envy at the arrival of a man authorized to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. There cannot be a greater vexation to wicked hearts than to see the spiritual Jerusalem in any likelihood of prosperity. Evil spirits and men need no other torment than their own despite.

This wise courtier hath learnt that secrecy is the surest way of any important despatch. His errand could not but be known to the governors; their furtherance was enjoined for the provision of materials; else the walls of Jerusalem had overlooked the first notice of their heathen neighbours. Without any noise doth Nehemiah arise in the dead of night, and taking some few into his company, none into his counsel, he secretly rounds the decayed walls of Jerusalem, and views the breaches, and observes the gates, and returns home in silence, joying in himself to foresee those reparations which none of the inhabitants did once dream of: at last, when he had fully digested this great work in his own breast, he calls the rulers and citizens together; and having condoled with them the common distress and reproach, he tells them of the hand of his God which was good upon him; he shows them the gracious commission of the king his master for that good work. They answer him with a zealous encouragement of each other, *Let us rise up and build.*

Such an hearty invitation, countenanced by authority, hath easily strengthened the hands of the multitude. With what observance and dearness do they now look upon their unexpected patron! how do they honour him as a man sent from heaven for the welfare of Jerusalem! Every man flies to his hod and trowel, and rejoices to second so noble a leader in laying a stone in that wall of their common defence.

Those emulous neighbours of theirs, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, the chief commanders of Moab, Ammon, Arabia, have soon espied the first mortar that is laid upon that old foundation. Envy is usually more quicksighted than love. And now they scornfully apply themselves to these despised Jews, and think to scoff them out of their work. The favourablest persecution of any good cause is the lash of lewd tongues, whether by bitter taunts or by scurrilous invectives, which it is as impossible to avoid as necessary to contemn.

The barking of these dogs doth not hinder Nehemiah from walking on his way. Professing his confidence in the God of heaven, whose work that was, he shakes off their impotent malice and goes on cheerfully to build.

Every Israelite knows his station. Eliashib the high priest and the rest of that sacred tribe put the first hand to this work. They build the sheep gate and sanctify it, and in it all the rest. As the firstfruits of the field, so the first stones of the wall are hallowed to God by the consecration of those devout agents. That business is like to prosper which begins with God.

No man was idle, no part was intermitted. All Jerusalem was at once encompassed with busy labourers. It cannot be but the joint endeavours of faithful hearts must raise the walls of the Church.

Now Sanballat and his brethren find some matter to spend their scoffs upon; *What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burnt?*

How basely do carnal minds think of the projects and actions of God's children! therefore vilifying them, because they measure them by no other line than outward probability. O foolish Moabites, this work is God's; and therefore, in despite of all your tongues and hands, it shall prosper. He hears you whom ye have blasphemed, and shall turn your reproach upon your own heads. And thou, proud Ammonite, that couldst say, *If a fox go upon their stone wall, he shall break it down*, shalt well find that all the wolvish troops of your confederates shall not be able to remove one stone of this sure fortification. While Moab and Ammon repine and bluster in vain, this wall shall rise; and when Moab and Ammon shall lie in the dust, this wall shall stand. The mortar that hath been tempered with so many prayers cannot but outlast all the flints and marbles of human confidence.

Now the growth of this wall hath turned the mirth of the adversaries into rage. These Moabites, Ammonites, Arabians, Ashdodites, conspire all together to fight against Jerusalem, and, while the mortar is yet green, to demolish those envied heaps.

What hath this city offended in desiring to be defenced? what wrong could it be to wish a freedom from wrongs? Were this people so mighty that there could be danger in overpowering their neighbours, or in resisting a common sovereign, there might have appeared some colour for this hostile opposition; but alas! what could a despised handful do to the prejudice of either? It is quarrel enough to Jerusalem that it would not be miserable.

Neither is it otherwise with the head of these hellish complices. There needs no other cause of his utmost fury than to see a poor soul struggling to get out of the reach of his tyranny. So do savage beasts bristle up themselves, and make the most fierce assaults, when they are in danger of losing the prey which they had once seized on.

In the mean while, what doth Nehemiah with his Jews for their common safety? They pray and watch; they pray unto God; they watch against the enemy. Thus, thus shall we happily prevail against those spiritual wickednesses which war against our souls. No evil can surprise us if we watch; no evil can hurt us if we pray; *This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.*

There was need of a continued vigilancy. The enemy was not more malicious than subtle, and had said, *They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst amongst them, and slay them.* Open force is not so dangerous as close dissimulation. They meant to seem Jews while they were Moabites and Ammonites; and in the clothes of brethren purposed to hide murderers. Never is Satan so prevalent as when he comes transformed into an angel of light.

It was a merciful providence of God that made these men's tongues the blabs of their own counsel. Many a fearful design had prospered if wickedness could have been silent. Warning is a lawful guard to a wise adversary. Now doth Nehemiah arm his people; and for the time changes their trowels into swords and spears and bows; raising up their courage with a vehement exhortation to *remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and to fight for their brethren, their sons, their daughters, their wives, and their houses.* Nothing can so hearten us to the en-

countering of any evil as the remembrance of that infinite power and wisdom which can either avert or mitigate or sanctify it. We could not faint if we did not forget God.

Necessity urges a man to fight for himself; love enables his hand to fight for those which challenge a part in him. Where love meets with necessity, there can want no endeavour of victory. Necessity can make even cowards valiant; love make the valiant unresistible: Nehemiah doth not therefore persuade these Jews to fight for themselves, but for theirs. The judgment of the interest and danger cannot but quicken the dullest spirits.

Discovered counsels are already prevented. These serpents die by being first seen: *When the enemies heard that it was known unto us,* they let fall their plot. Could we descry the enterprises of Satan, that tempter would return ashamed.

It is a safe point of wisdom to carry a jealous eye over those whom we have once found hollow and hostile. From that time forth, Nehemiah divided the task betwixt the trowel and the sword! so disposing of every Israelite, that while one hand was a mason the other was a soldier; one is for work, the other for defence.

O lively image of the church militant, wherein every one labours weaponed; wherein there is neither an idle soldier nor a secure workman! Every one so builds as that he is ready to ward temptations; every one so wields the sword of the Spirit for defence, that withal he builds up himself in his most holy faith. Here is neither a fruitless valour nor an unsafe diligence.

But what can our weapons avail us, if there be not means to warn us of an enemy? Without a trumpet we are armed in vain: *The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.* Yea, so far as the utmost bounds of the earth are we separated one from another, upon the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem: only the sacred trumpets of God call us, who are distant in place, to a combination in profession.

And who are those trumpets but the public messengers of God, of whom God hath said, *If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand?* Woe be to us, if we sound not; if the sound we give be uncertain! Woe be to our people, if when we premonish

them of enemies, of judgments, they sit still unmoved; not buckling themselves to a resistance, to a prevention!

It is a mutual aid to which these trumpets invite us; we might fight apart without the signals of war: *In what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us.* There can be no safety to the Church but where every man thinks his life and welfare consists in his fellows. Conjoined forces may prosper, single oppositions are desperate. All hearts and hands must meet in the common quarrel.

NEHEMIAH REDRESSING THE EXTORTION OF THE JEWS.—Nehemiah v, vi.

With what difficulty do these miserable Jews settle in their Jerusalem! The fear of foreign enemies doth not more afflict them than the extortion of their own. Dearth is added unto war. Miseries do not stay for a mannerly succession to each other, but in a rude importunity throng in at once. Babel may be built with ease, but whosoever goes about to raise the walls of God's city shall have his hands full. The incursion of public enemies may be prevented with vigilancy and power, but there is no defence against the secret gripes of oppression.

There is no remedy. The Jews are so taken up with their trowel and sword for the time, that they cannot attend their trades; so as while the wall did rise their estates must needs impair. Even in the cheapest season they must needs be poor that earned nothing but the public safety; how much more in a common scarcity! Their houses, lands, vineyards, are therefore mortgaged; yea, their very skins are sold for corn to their brethren. Necessity forces them to sell that which it was cruelty to buy. What will we not, what must we not part with for life?

The covetous rulers did not consider the occasions of this want, but the advantage. Sometimes a bargain may be as unmerciful as a robbery. Charity must be the rule of all contracts, the violation whereof, whether in the matter or the price, cannot but be sinful.

There could not be a juster ground of expostulation than this of the oppressed Jews; "*Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters.* While there is no difference in

nature, why should there be such an injurious disproportion in condition?"

Even the same flesh may bear a just inequality: some may be rulers, while others are subject; some wealthy, others poor; but why those wealthy rulers should tyrannize over those poor inferiors, and turn brotherhood into bondage, no reason can be given but lawless ambition. If there were one flesh of peers, another of peasants, there should be some colour for the proud impositions of the great; as because the flesh of beasts is in a lower rank than ours, we kill, we devour it at pleasure: but now, since the large body of mankind consists of the same flesh, why should the hand strike the foot?

And if one flesh may challenge meet respects from us, how much more one spirit! The spirit is more noble than the flesh is base. The flesh is dead without the spirit, the spirit, without the flesh, active and immortal. Our soul, though shapeless and immaterial, is more apparently one than the flesh. And if the unity of our human spirit call us to a mutual care and tenderness in our carriage each to other, how much more of the divine! By that, we are men; by this, we are Christians. As the soul animates us to a natural life, so doth God's Spirit animate the soul to an heavenly; which is so one that it cannot be divided. How should that one Spirit cause us so far to forget all natural and civil differences, as not to contemn, not to oppress any whom it informeth!

They are not Christians, not men, that can enjoy the miseries of their brethren, whether in the flesh or spirit.

Good Nehemiah cannot choose but be much moved at the barbarous extortion of the people; and now, like an unpartial governor, he rebukes the rulers and nobles whose hand was thus bloody with oppression. As of fishes, so of men, the lesser are a prey to the great. It is an ill use made of power when the weight of it serves only to crush the weak. There were no living amongst men had not God ordained higher than the highest, and yet higher than they. Eminency of place cannot be better improved than by taking down mighty offenders. If nobility do embase itself to any foul sin, it is so much more worthy of coercion by how much the person is of greater mark.

The justice of this reproof could not but shame impudence itself; "*We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold to the heathen; and will you sell your brethren? or shall they be sold to us?* Shall they find at home

that yoke of bondage which they had put off abroad? While they are still Jews, shall we turn Assyrians? If they must be slaves, why not rather to enemies than to brethren? How much more tolerable were a foreign servitude than a domestical! Be ashamed, O ye nobles of Israel, to renew Babylon in Jerusalem." I marvel not if the offenders be stricken dumb with so unanswerable an expostulation. Guiltiness and confusion have stopped their mouths.

Many of those who have not had grace enough to refrain sin, yet are not so utterly void of grace as to maintain sin. Our afterwits are able to discern a kind of unreasonableness in those wicked actions which the first appearance represents unto us plausible. Gain leads in sin, but shame follows it out.

There are those that are bold and witty to bear out commodious or pleasant evils. Neither could these Jewish enormities have wanted some colours of defence. Their stock was their own, which might have been otherwise improved to no less profit. The offer, the suit of these bargains was from the sellers: these escheats fell into their hands unsought; neither did their contract cause the need of their brethren, but relieve it. But their conscience will not bear this plea. I know not whether the maintenance of the least evil be not worse than the commission of the greatest; this may be of frailty, that argues obstinacy. There is hope of that man that can blush and be silent.

After the conviction of the fact, it is seasonable for Nehemiah to persuade reformation. No oratory is so powerful as that of mildness; especially when we have to do with those who, either through stomach or greatness, may not endure a rough reproof. The drops that fall easily upon the corn ripen and fill the ear; but the stormy showers, that fall with violence, beat down the stalks flat to the earth, and lay whole fields without hope of recovery.

Who can resist this sweet and sovereign reprehension: "*Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen, our enemies?* Did we dwell alone in the midst of the earth, yet the fear of our God should overawe our ways; but now that we dwell in the midst of our enemies, whose eyes are bent upon all our actions, whose tongues are as ready to blaspheme God as we to offend him, how carefully should we avoid those sins which may draw shame upon our profession! Now the scandal is worse than the fact. Thus shall religion suffer more from the

heathen than our brethren do from us. If justice, if charity cannot sway with us, yet let the scornful insultations of the profane Gentiles affright us from these pressures."

No ingenuous disposition can be so tender of his own disgrace as the true Israelite is of the reproach of his God. What is it that he will not rather refrain, do, suffer, than that glorious name shall hazard a blemish? They cannot want outward retentives from sin that live either among friends or enemies: if friends, they may not be grieved; if enemies, they may not be provoked. Those that would live well must stand in awe of all eyes. Even those that are without the Church, yet may not be without regard. No person can be so contemptible as that his censure should be contemned.

In dissuading from sin, reason itself cannot prevail more than example: "*I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn.* But from the time that I was appointed to the charge of Judah, *I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.*" He shall never rule well that doth all that he may. It is not safe for either part that a prince should live at the height of his power; and if the greatest abate of their right, is it for inferiors to extort?

Had Nehemiah aimed at his own greatness, no man could have had fairer pretences for his gain: *The former governors that were before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.* His foot had not first trod in this commodious path: it was beaten by the steps of his predecessors, neither did any of them walk besides it. However it might be envious to raise new taxations, yet to continue those he found unrepined at, had been out of the reach of exception.

A good governor looks not so much what hath been done, as what should be. Precedents are not the rule whereby he rules, but justice, but piety: *So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.* Laws are not a straiter curb to subjects than conscience is to good princes. They dare not do what they cannot do charitably. What advantage can they think it to be from under the controlment of men, when the God of heaven notes and punishes their offences? Whoso walketh by this rule can neither err nor miscarry.

It is no trusting to the external remedies of sin: either they are not always present, or, if present, not powerful enough; but

if the fear of God have once taken up the heart, it goes ever with us, and is strong enough to overmaster the forciblest temptation.

Therefore must these Jews follow this example of Nehemiah, because he followed not the example of his predecessors; because he left their evil, they must imitate his good. In vain shall rulers advise against their own practice; when they lead the way, they may well challenge to be followed. Seldom hath it been ever seen that great persons have not been seconded in evil. Why should not their power serve to make patterns of their virtues?

Thus well did it speed with Nehemiah. His merciful carriage and zealous suit have drawn the rulers to a promise of restitution: *We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest.*

It is no small advantage that these nobles must forego in their releases. There cannot be a better sign of a sound amendment, than that we can be content to be losers by our repentance. Many formal penitents have yielded to part with so much of their sin as may abate nothing of their profit; as if these rulers should have been willing to restore the persons, but withal should have stood stiffly to require their sums. This whining and partial satisfaction had been thankless. True remorse enlargeth the heart, and openeth the hand to a bountiful redemption of our errors.

Good purposes do too often cool in time, and vanish into a careless forgetfulness. Nehemiah feared this issue of these holy resolutions, and therefore he prosecutes them in their first heat; not leaving these promises till he had secured them with an oath. The priests are called for, that in their mouths the adjuration may be more solemn and sacred. It is the best point of wisdom to take the first opportunity of fixing good motions, which otherwise are of themselves light and slighty. To make all yet more sure, their oaths are crossbarred with his execration: *Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out, and emptied: and all the congregation said, Amen.* A promise, an oath, a curse, are passed upon this act; now no Israelite dares falter in the execution. When we have a sin in chase, it is good to follow it home, not slackening our pursuit till we have fully prevailed; and when it is once fallen under our hands, we cannot kill it too much.

Now Nehemiah, having thus happily delivered his people from

a domestical captivity, commends his service to the gracious remuneration of the Almighty; *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.* Therefore doth he refuse the bread of the governor that he may receive the reward of the Governor of heaven! Had he taken a temporary recompense, both he and it had been forgotten; now, he hath made an happy change for eternity. Not that he pleads his merit, but sues for mercy; neither doth he pray to be remembered for his work, but according to his work.

Our good deeds, as they are well accepted of God, so they shall not go unrewarded; and what God will give, why may not we crave? Doubtless, as we may offer up our honest obediences unto God, so we may expect and beg his promised retributions; not out of a proud conceit of the worth of our earnings, who, at the best, are no other than unprofitable servants, but out of a faithful dependance upon his pact of bounty, who cannot be less than his word. O God, if we do aught that is good, it is thine act and not ours: crown thine own work in us, and take thou the glory of thine own mercies.

While Nehemiah is busy in the reforming abuses at home, the enemy is plotting against him abroad. Sanballat and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, conspire against his life, and, in him, against the peace of Jerusalem.

What open hostility could not do, they hope to effect by pretence of treaties. Four several messages call Nehemiah to a friendly meeting. Distrust is a sure guard. The wise governor hath learned to suspect the hollow favours of an enemy, and to return them with safe and just excuses: *I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?* I do not hear him say, "You intend mischief to me; I will not come forth to you;" though this were the proper cause of his forbearance; but he turns them off with an answer that had as much truth as reservedness. Fraud is the fitliest answered with subtlety. Even innocency is allowed a lawful craft. That man is in an ill case that conceals no truth from an adversary.

What entreaties cannot do shall be attempted by threats. Sanballat's servant comes now, the fifth time, with an opened letter, importing dangerous intimations, wherein is written, *It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king.*

It is reported: and what falsehood may not plead this warrant? What can be more lying than report? *Among the heathen:* and who is more ethnic than Sanballat? What pagan can be worse than a mongrel idolater? *And Gashmu saith it:* "Ask my fellow else." This Arabian was one of those three heads of all the hostile combination against Jerusalem, against Nehemiah. It would be wide with innocence if enemies might be allowed to accuse. *That the Jews think to rebel:* a stale suggestion, but once powerful. Malice hath learned to miscall all actions. Where the hands cannot be taxed, very thoughts are prejudged; *For which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king.*

He was never true Israelite that hath not passed spiteful slanders and misconstructions. Artaxerxes knew his servant too well to believe any rumour that should have been so shameless. The ambition of Nehemiah was well known to reach only to the cup, not to the sceptre, of his sovereign. And yet, to make up a sound tale, *Prophets are suborned to preach, There is a king in Judah:* as if that loyal governor had corrupted the pulpits also, and had taught them the language of treason.

But what of all this? what if some false tongue have whispered such idle tales? It is not safe for thee, O Nehemiah, to contemn report. Perhaps this news shall fly to the court, and work thee a deadly displeasure ere thou canst know thyself traduced. Come therefore, and let us take counsel together. Surely that man cannot be sparing of any thing that is prodigal of his reputation. If aught under heaven can fetch Nehemiah out of his hold, it is the care of his fame. But that wary governor sees a net spread near unto this stall; and therefore keeps aloof, not without contempt of those sly devices: *There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.* Some imputations are best answered with a neglective denial. It falls out often that plaindealing puts craft out of countenance.

Since neither force nor fraud can kill Nehemiah, they will now try to draw him into a sin, and thereby into a reproach. O God, that any prophet's tongue should be mercenary! Shemaiah the seer is hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to affright the governor with the noise of his intended murder, and to advise him for shelter to fly to the forbidden refuge of the temple. The colour was fair: "Violence is meant to thy person. No place but one can promise thee safety: the city hath as yet no gates: come therefore, and shut thyself up in the temple; there only shalt thou be free from all assaults."

And what if Nehemiah had hearkened to this counsel? Sin and shame had followed. That holy place was for none but persons sacred; such as were privileged by blood and function: others should presume and offend in entering. And now, what would the people say? "What shall become of us while our governor hides his head for fear? Where shall we find a temple to secure us? What do we depending upon a cowardly leader?"

Well did Nehemiah forecast these circumstances both of act and event; and therefore, resolving to distrust a prophet that persuaded him to the violation of a law, he rejects the motion with scorn; *Should such a man as I flee? Should I go into the temple to save my life? I will not go.* It is fit for great persons to stand upon the honour of their places. Their very stations should put those spirits into them that should make them hate to stoop unto base conditions.

Had God sent this message, we know he hath power to dispense with his own laws; but well might the contradiction of a law argue the message not sent of God. God, as he is one, so doth he perfectly agree with himself. If any private spirit cross a written word, let him be accursed.

AHASUERUS FEASTING; VASHTI CAST OFF; ESTHER CHOSEN.—Esther i, ii.

What bounds can be set to human ambition! Ahasuerus, that is, Xerxes, the son of Darius, is already the king of an hundred and seven and twenty provinces, and now is ready to fight for more. He hath newly subdued Egypt, and is now addressing himself for the conquest of Greece. He cannot hope ever to see all the land that he possesseth, and yet he cannot be quiet while he hears of more. Less than two ells of earth shall ere long serve him whom for the time a whole world shall scarce satisfy. In vain shall a man strive to have that which he cannot enjoy, and to enjoy aught by mere relation. It is a windy happiness that is sought in the exaggeration of those titles which are taken upon others' credit without the sense of the owner. Nothing can fill the heart of man but he that made it.

This great monarch, partly in triumph of the great victories that he hath lately won in Egypt, and partly for the animation of his princes and soldiers to his future exploits, makes a feast,

like himself, royal and magnificent. What is greatness if it be not showed? And wherein can greatness be better shown than in the achievements of war, and the entertainment of peace?

All other feasts were but hunger to this of Ahasuerus; whether we regard the number of guests, or the largeness of preparation, or continuance of time. During the space of a whole half-year all the tables were sumptuously furnished for all comers from India to Ethiopia; a world of meat; every meal was so set on as if it should have been the last. Yet all this long feast hath an end; and all this glory is shut up in forgetfulness. What is Ahasuerus the better that his peers then said he was incomparably great? what are his peers the better that they were feasted? Happy is he that eats bread and drinks new wine in the kingdom of God. This banquet is for eternity; without intermission, without satiety.

What variety of habits, of languages, of manners, met at the boards of Ahasuerus! what confluence of strange guests was there now to Shushan! and, lest the glory of this great king might seem, like some coarse picture, only fair afar off, after the princes and nobles of the remote provinces, all the people of Shushan are entertained for seven days with equal pomp and state. The spacious court of the palace is turned into a royal hall: the walls are of rich hangings, the pillars of marble, the beds of silver and gold, the pavement of porphyry curiously chequered. The wine and the vessels strove whether should be the richer: no men drunk in worse than gold; and while the metal was the same, the form of each cup was diverse. The attendance was answerable to the cheer; and the freedom matched both: here was no compulsion either to the measure or quality of the draught; every man's rule was his own choice. Who can but blush to see forced healths in Christian banquets, when the civility of very pagans commands liberty?

I cannot but envy the modesty of heathen dames. Vashti the queen, and her ladies, with all the several ranks of that sex, feast apart, entertaining each other with a bashful courtesy, without wantonness, without that wild scurrility which useth to haunt promiscuous meetings. O shameful unchastity of those loose Christians, who must feed their lust while they fill their bellies, and think the feast unperfect where they may not satiate their eye no less than palate!

The last day of this pompous feast is now come. King Aha-

suerus is so much more cheerful by how much his guests are near to their dismission. Every one is wont to close up his courtesy with so much more passion, as the last acts use to make the deeper impression. And now, that he might at once amaze and endear the beholders, Vashti the queen, in all her royalty, is called for. Her sight shall shut up the feast; that the princes and the people may say, "How happy is king Ahasuerus, not so much in this greatness, as in that beauty!"

Seven officers of the chamber are sent to carry the message, to attend her entrance, and are returned with a denial. Perhaps Vashti thought; "What means this uncouth motion? More than six months hath this feast continued, and all this while we have enjoyed the wonted liberty of our sex. Were the king still himself, this command could not be sent. It is the wine, and not he, that is guilty of this errand. Is it for me to humour him in so vain a desire? Will it agree with our modest reservedness to offer ourselves to be gazed at by millions of eyes? Who knows what wanton attempts may follow upon this ungoverned excess? This very message argues that wit and reason have yielded their places to that besotted liquor. Nothing but absence can secure us from some unbeseeming proffer. Neither doubt I but the king, when he returns to himself, will give me thanks for so wise a forbearance."

Thus upon the conceit, as is likely, that her presence would be either needless or unsafe, Vashti refuseth to come; although, perhaps, her great spirits thought much to receive a command from the hand of officers.

The blood that is once inflamed with wine is apt to boil with rage. Ahasuerus is very wroth with this indign repulse. It was the ostentation of his glory and might that he affected before these princes, peers, people; and now that seems eclipsed, in the shutting up of all his magnificence with the disgraceful affront of a woman. It vexes him to think that those nobles, whom he meant to send away astonished with the admiration of his power and majesty, should now say, "What boots it Ahasuerus to rule afar off, when he cannot command at home? In vain doth he boast to govern kings, while he is checked by a woman."

Whatever were the intentions of Vashti, surely her disobedience was inexcusable. It is not for a good wife to judge of her husband's will, but to execute it. Neither wit nor stomach may carry her into a curious inquisition, into the reasons of an enjoined

charge, much less to a resistance; but in a hoodwinked simplicity she must follow whither she is led, as one that holds her chief praise to consist in subjection.

Where should the perfection of wisdom dwell if not in the court of princes? or what can the treasures of monarchs purchase more invaluably precious than learned and judicious attendance? or who can be so fit for honour as the wisest? I doubt how Ahasuerus could have been so great, if his throne had not been still compassed with them that knew the times, and understood the law and judgment. These were his oracles in all his doubts. These are now consulted in this difficulty. Neither must their advice be secretly whispered in the king's ear, but publicly delivered in the audience of all the princes.

It is a perilous way that these sages are called to go betwixt an husband and wife, especially of such power and eminency; yet Memucan fears not to pass a heavy sentence against queen Vashti. *Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus:* a deep and sore crimination. Injuries are so much more intolerable as they are dilated unto more. Those offences which are of narrow extent may receive an easy satisfaction; the amends are not possible where the wrong is universal: *For this deed of the queen shall come abroad to all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes.* Indeed so public a fact must needs fly; that concourse gave fit opportunity to diffuse it all the world over. The examples of the great are easily drawn into rules. Bad lessons are apt to be taken out. As honour, so contempt, falls down from the head to the skirts; never ascends from the skirts to the head.

These wise men are so much the more sensible of this danger, as they saw it more likely the case might prove their own: *Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes.* The first precedents of evil must be carefully avoided, if we care to keep a constant order in good. Prudence cannot better bestir itself than in keeping mischief from home.

The foundation of this doom of Memucan is not laid so deep for nothing: *If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of Persians and Medians, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another that is better than she.*

How bold a word was this, and how hazardous! Had Ahasuerus more loved the beauty of Vashti than his honour, Memucan had spoken against his own life. Howsoever, a queen of so great spirit could not want strength of favour and faction in the Persian court, which could but not take fire at so desperate a motion. Faithful statesmen, overlooking private respects, must bend their eyes upon public dangers, labouring to prevent a common mischief, though with the adventure of their own.

Nature had taught these pagans the necessity of a female subjection, and the hate and scorn of a proud disobedience. They have unlearned the very dictates of nature that can abide the head to be set below the rib.

I cannot say but Vashti was worthy of a sharp censure; I cannot say she was worthy a repudiation. This plaister drew too hard. It was but heathen justice to punish the wife's disobedience in one indifferent act with a divorce. Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or untie the knot of marriage.

Had she not been a queen, had not that contemptuous act been public, the sentence had not been so hard: now the punishment must be exemplary, lest the sin should be so. Many a one had smarted less, if their persons, if their place had been meaner.

The king, the princes, approve this heavy judgment of Memucan. It is not in the power of the fair face of Vashti to warrant her stomach. No doubt many messages passed ere the rigour of this execution. That great heart knows not to relent, but will rather break than yield to an humble deprecation. When the stone and the steel meet, fire is stricken; it is a soft answer that appeaseth wrath. Vashti is cast off. Letters are sent from the king into all his provinces, to command that every man should rule at home. The court affords them an awful pattern of authority. Had not Ahasuerus doted much upon Vashti's beauty, he had not called her forth at the feast to be wondered at by his peers and people; yet now he so feels the wound of his reputation, that he forgets he ever felt any wound of his affection. Even the greatest love may be overstrained. It is not safe presuming upon the deepest assurances of dearness. There is no heart that may not be estranged.

It is not possible that great princes should want soothing up in all their inclinations, in all their actions. While Ahasuerus is following the chase of his ambition in the wars of Greece, his

followers are providing for his lust at home. Nothing could sound more pleasing to a carnal ear, than that all the fair young virgins throughout all his dominions should be gathered into his palace at Shushan, for his assay and choice. The decree is soon published. The charge is committed to Hegai the king's chamberlain, both of their purification and ornaments.

What strife, what emulation, was now amongst all the Persian damsels that either were or thought themselves fair! Every one hopes to be a queen, and sees no reason why any other should be thought more excellent. How happy were we, if we could be so ambitious of our espousals to the King of heaven!

Amongst all this throng of virgins, God hath provided a wife for Ahasuerus; having determined his choice where most advantage shall rise to his forlorn people.

The Jews were miserably scattered over the world in that woful deportation under Jeconiah. Scarce an handful of them returned to Jerusalem: the rest remained still dispersed, where they may but have leave to live. There are many thousands of them turned over with the Babylonian monarchy to the Persian. Amongst the rest was Mordecai, the son of Jair, of the tribe of Benjamin; a man of no mean note or ability; who, living in Shushan, had brought up Hadassah, or Esther, his uncle's daughter, in a liberal fashion. It was happy for this orphan that in a region of captivity she lighted into such good hands. Her wise kinsman finds it fit that her breeding and habit should be Persian-like. In outward and civil forms there was no need to vary from the heathen; her religion must be her own: the rest was so altogether theirs, that her very nation was not discerned.

The same God that had given incomparable beauty to this Jewess gave her also favour in the eyes of Hegai the keeper of the women. She is not only taken into the Persian court as one of the selected virgins, but observed with more than ordinary respect. All necessaries for her speedy purification are brought to her; seven maids are allowed for her attendance; and the best and most honourable place in that seraglio is allotted to her: as if this great officer had designed her for a queen before the choice of his master.

What strange preparation was here for the impure bed of a heathen! Every virgin must be six months purified with oil of myrrh, and six other months perfumed with sweet odours; besides those special receipts that were allowed to each upon their

own election. O God, what care, what cost is requisite to that soul which should be addressed a fit bride for thine own holy and glorious Majesty! When we have scoured ourselves with the most cleansing oil of our repentance, and have perfumed ourselves with thy best graces and our perfectest obedience, it is the only praise of thy mercy that we may be accepted.

The other virgins passed their probation unregarded. When Esther's turn came, though she required nothing, but took what was given her; though she affected nothing, but brought that face, that demeanour, which nature had cast upon her; no eye sees her without admiration. The king takes such pleasure in her beauty, that, contemning all the other vulgar forms, his choice is fully fixed upon her. All things must prosper where God hath intended the success.

The most wise providence of the Almighty fetches his projects from far. The preservation and advantage of his own people is in hand. For the contriving of this, Vashti shall be abandoned; the virgins shall be chosen; Esther only shall please Ahasuerus; Mordecai shall displease Haman; Haman's ruin shall raise Mordecai. The purposes of God cannot be judged by his remote actions; only the accomplishment shows his designs: in the mean time, it pleaseth him to look another way than he moves; and to work his own ends by arbitrary and unlikely accidents.

None but Esther shall succeed Vashti. She only carries the heart of Ahasuerus from all her sex. The royal crown is set upon her head; and as Vashti was cast off at a feast, so with a solemn feast shall Esther be espoused. Here wanted no triumph to express the joy of this great bridegroom; and that the world might witness he could be no less loving than severe, all his provinces shall feel the pleasure of this happy match in their immunities, in their rich gifts.

With what envious eyes do we think Vashti looked upon her glorious rival! How doth she now, though too late, secretly chide her peevish will that had thus stript her of her royal crown, and made way for a more happy successor! Little did she think her refusal could have had so heinous a construction. Little did she fear that one word, perhaps not ill meant, should have forfeited her husband, her crown, and all that she was. Whoso is not wise enough to forecast the danger of an offence or indiscretion, may have leisure enough of an unseasonable repentance.

That mind is truly great and noble that is not changed with

the highest prosperity. Queen Esther cannot forget her cousin Mordecai. No pomp can make her slight the charge of so dear a kinsman. In all her royalty she casts her eye upon him amongst the throng of beholders, but she must not know him. Her obedience keeps her in awe, and will not suffer her to draw him up with her to the participation of her honour. It troubles her not a little to forbear this duty, but she must. It is enough for her that Mordecai hath commanded her not to be known who or whose she was.

Perhaps the wise Jew feared, that while her honour was yet green and unsettled the notice of her nation, and the name of a despised captive, might be some blemish to her in that proud court; when as afterwards, upon the merit of her carriage and the full possession of all hearts, her name might dignify her nation and countermand all reproaches.

Mordecai was an officer in the court of Ahasuerus. His service called him daily to attend in the king's gate. Much better might he, being a Jew, serve a pagan master, than his foster-daughter might ascend to a pagan's bed.

If the necessity or convenience of his occasions called him to serve, his piety and religion called him to faithfulness in his service. Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, conspire against the life of their sovereign. No greatness can secure from treachery or violence. He that ruled over millions of men, through an hundred and seven and twenty provinces, cannot assure himself from the hand of a villain. He that had the power of other men's lives is in danger of his own. Happy is that man that is once possessed of a crown incorruptible, unfadable, reserved for him in heaven. No force, no treason can reach thither: there can be no peril of either violence or forfeiture.

The likeliest defence of the person of any prince is the fidelity of his attendants. Mordecai overhears the whispering of these wicked conspirators, and reveals it to Esther. She, as glad of such an opportunity to commend unto Ahasuerus the loyalty of him whom she durst but secretly honour, reveals it to the king. The circumstances are examined; the plot is discovered; the traitors executed; the service recorded in the Persian annals.

A good foundation is thus laid for Mordecai's advancement, which yet is not over hastened on either part. Worthy dispositions labour only to deserve well; leaving the care of their remuneration to them whom it concerns. It is fit that God's

leisure should be attended in all his designments. The hour is set when Mordecai shall be raised; if in the meantime there be an intervention, not only of neglect, but of fears and dangers, all these shall make his honour so much more sweet, more precious.

HAMAN DISRESPECTED BY MORDECAI; MORDECAI'S MESSAGE TO ESTHER.—Esther iii, iv.

Besides the charge of his office, the care of Esther's prosperity calls Mordecai to the king's gate, and fixes him there.

With what inward contentment did he think of his so royal pupil! "Here I sit among my fellows. Little doth the world think that mine adopted child sits in the throne of Persia; that the great empress of the world owes herself to me. I might have more honour, I could not have so much secret comfort, if all Shushan knew what interest I have in queen Esther."

While his heart is taken up with these thoughts, who should come ruffling by him but the new-raised favourite of king Ahasuerus Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite? Him hath the great king unexpectedly advanced, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. The gracious respects of princes are not always led by merit, but by their own will; which is ever affected to be so much the freer as themselves would be held more great.

When the sun shines upon the dial every passenger will be looking at it. There needed no command of reverence where Ahasuerus was pleased to countenance. All knees will bow alone even to forbidden idols of honour, how much more where royal authority enjoins obeisance! All the servants, all the subjects of king Ahasuerus are willingly prostrate before this great minion of their sovereign. Only Mordecai stands stiff, as if he saw nothing more than a man in that proud Agagite.

They are not observed that do as the most; but if any one man shall vary from the multitude all eyes are turned upon him. Mordecai's fellow-officers note this palpable irreverence, and expostulate it; "*Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?* Considerest thou not how far this affront reacheth? It is not the person of Haman whom thou refusest to adore, but the king in him. Neither do we regard so much the man as the command. Let him be never so vile whom the king bids to be ho-

noured, with what safety can a subject examine the charge or resist it? His unworthiness cannot dispense with our loyalty. What a dangerous wilfulness should it be to incur the forfeiture of thy place, of thy life, for a courtesy! If thou wilt not bow with others, expect to suffer alone."

"Perhaps," they thought, "this omission was unheedy." In a case of ignorance or incogitancy it was a friendly office to admonish: the sight of the error had been the remedy.

Mordecai hears their challenge, their advice; and thinks good to answer both with silence: as willing they should imagine his inflexibleness proceeded from a resolution, and that resolution upon some secret grounds which he needed not impart: at last yet he imparts thus much; "Let it suffice that I am a Jew, and Haman an Amalekite."

After a private expostulation, the continuance of that open neglect is construed for a sullen obstinacy; and now the monitors themselves grow sensible of the contempt. Men are commonly impatient to lose the thank of their endeavours, and are prone to hate whom they cannot reform. Partly therefore to pick a thank, and partly to revenge this contumacy, these officers turn informers against Mordecai; neither meant to make the matter fairer than it was. They tell Haman how proud and stubborn a Jew sat amongst them; how ill they could brook so saucy an affront to be offered to his greatness; how seriously they had expostulated; how stomachfully the offender persisted; and beseech him that he would be pleased in his next passage to cast some glances that way, and but observe the fashion of that intolerable insolency.

The proud Agagite cannot long endure the very expectation of such an indignity. On purpose doth he stalk thither with higher than his ordinary steps, snuffing up the air as he goes, and would see the man that durst deny reverence to the greatest prince of Persia.

Mordecai holds his old posture, only he is so much more careless as he sees Haman more disdainful and imperious. Neither of them goes about to hide his passion: one looked as if he said, "I hate the pride of Haman;" the other looked as if he said, "I will plague the contempt of Mordecai." How did the eyes of Haman sparkle with fury, and, as it were, dart out deadly beams in the face of that despiteful Jew! how did he swell with indignation, and then again wax pale with anger! Shortly his very brow and his motion bade Mordecai look for the utmost of revenge.

Mordecai foresees his danger and contemns it; no frowns, no threats can supple those joints; he may break, he will not bow.

What shall we say then to this obfirmed resolution of Mordecai? what is it, what can it be, that so stiffens the knees of Mordecai, that death is more easy to him than their incurvation? Certainly if mere civility were in question, this wilful irreverence to so great a peer could not pass without the just censure of a rude perverseness. It is religion that forbids this obeisance, and tells him that such courtesy could not be free from sin. Whether it were that more than human honour was required to this new-erected image of the great king, as the Persians were ever wont to be noted for too much lavishness in these courtly devotions; or whether it were that the ancient curse wherewith God had branded the blood and stock of Haman (Exod. xvii. 16; Deut. xxv. 19) made it unlawful for an Israelite to give him any observance; for the Amalekites, of whose royal line Haman was descended, were the nation with which God had sworn perpetual hostility, and whose memory he had straitly charged his people to root out from under heaven. "How may I," thinks he, "adore where God commands me to detest? how may I profess respect where God professeth enmity? how may I contribute to the establishment of that seed upon earth which God hath charged to be pulled up from under heaven?" Outward actions of indifferency, when once they are felt to trench upon the conscience, lay deep obligations upon the soul, even while they are most slighted by careless hearts.

In what a flame of wrath doth Haman live this while! wherewith he could not but have consumed his own heart had he not given vent to that rage in his assured purposes of revenge.

Great mens' anger is like to themselves, strong, fierce, ambitious of an excessive satisfaction. Haman scorns to take up with the blood of Mordecai; this were but a vulgar amends. Poor men can kill where they hate, and expiate their own wrong with the life of a single enemy; Haman's fury shall fly a higher pitch. Millions of throats are few enow to bleed for this offence. It is a Jew that hath despited him; all the whole nation of the Jews shall perish for the stomach of this one. The monarchy of the world was now in the hand of the Persian. As Judea was within this compass, so there was scarce a Jew upon earth without the verge of the Persian dominions. The generation, the name shall now die at once. Neither shall there be any memory of them but this: "There was a people, which, having been famous through

the world for three thousand four hundred and fourscore years, were in a moment extinct by the power of Haman, for default of a courtesy."

Perhaps that hereditary grudge and old antipathy that was betwixt Israel and Amalek stuck still in the heart of this Agagite. He might know that God had commanded Israel to root out Amalek from under heaven, and now therefore an Amalekite shall be ready to take this advantage against Israel.

It is extreme injustice to dilate the punishment beyond the offence, and to enwrap thousands of innocents within the trespass of one. How many that were yet unborn when Haman was unsaluted must rue the fact they lived not to know! how many millions of Jews were then living that knew not there was a Mordecai! All of them are fetched into one condition, and must suffer ere they can know their offence.

O the infinite distance betwixt the unjust cruelty of men and the just mercies of the Almighty! Even Caiaphas himself could say, *It is better that one man die, than that all the people should perish:* and here Haman can say, "It is better that all the people should perish, than that one man should die." Thy mercy, O God, by the willing death of one that had not sinned, hath defrayed the just death of a world of sinners; while the injurious rigour of a man, for the supposed fault of one, would destroy a whole nation that had not offended. It is true, that by the sin of one, death reigned over all; but it was because all sinned in that one. Had not all men been in Adam all had not fallen in him, all had not died in him. It was not the man, but mankind that fell into sin, and by sin into death. No man can complain of punishment while no man can exempt himself from the transgression. Unmerciful Haman would have imbrued his hands in that blood which he could not but confess innocent.

It is a rare thing if the height of favour cause not presumption. Such is Haman's greatness, that he takes his design for granted ere it can receive a motion. The fittest days for this great massacre are determined by the lots of their common divination, according whereunto Haman chooseth the hour of this bloody suit; and now, waited on by opportunity, he addresseth himself to king Ahasuerus: *There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of the kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer*

them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of the officers.

With what cunning hath this man couched his malice! he doth not say, "There is a Jew that hath affronted me; let me be avenged of his nation:" this rancour was too monstrous to be confessed. Perhaps this suggestion might have bred in the mind of Ahasuerus a conceit of Haman's ill nature and intolerable immanity; but his pretences are plausible, and such as drive at no other than the public good.

Every word hath his insinuation.

It is a scattered people. Were the nation entire, their maintenance could not but stand with the king's honour; but now, since they are but stragglers, as their loss would be insensible, so their continuance and mixture cannot but be prejudicial. It was not the fault, it was the misery of these poor Jews, that they were dispersed; and now their dispersion is made an argument of their extirpation: therefore must they be destroyed from the earth, because they were scattered over the earth. As good, so evils draw on each other. That which should plead for pity in the well-affected is a motive to cruelty in savage minds. Seldom ever hath extremity of mischief seized where easier afflictions have not been billeted before. All faithful Jews had wont to say unto God, *Have mercy upon us, O God, and save us, for our soul is full of contempt, and we are scattered amongst the heathen;* and here this enemy can say of them to Ahasuerus, "*Destroy them, for they are scattered;* root them out, for they are condemned." How much better is it to fall into the hands of God than of men; since that which whets the sword of men works commiseration in the Almighty!

Besides the dissipation of the persons, "*Their laws are diverse from all people;* all other people live by thy laws, they only by their own; and how can this singularity of their fashions but breed disorder and inconvenience? Did they live in some corner of the earth apart, the difference in religion and government could not import much; now that they are dispersed amongst all thy subjects, what do these uncouth forms of theirs but teach all the world to be irregular? Why should they live under thy protection that will not be governed by thy laws?" Wicked Haman! what were the laws of Israel but the laws of God? If this be a quarrel, what shall the death of the Jews be other than martyr-

dom? The diversity of judgment and practice from the rest of the world hath been an old and envious imputation cast upon God's Church. What if we be singled from others while we walk with God? In matters lawful, arbitrary, indifferent, wisdom teacheth us to conform ourselves to all others; but where God hath laid a special imposition upon us, we must either vary or sin. The greatest glory of Israel was their laws; wherein they as far exceeded all other nations as heaven is above earth; yet here their laws are quarrelled, and are made the inducements of their destruction. It is not possible that the Church of God should escape persecution while that which it hath good is maligned, while that offends which makes it happy.

"Yet that they have laws of their own were not so unsufferable, if, withal, they did observe thine, O king; but these Jews, as they are unconformable, so they are seditious: *they keep not the king's laws.*" Thou slanderest, Haman. They could not keep their own laws if they kept not the king's; for their laws call them to obedience unto their sovereigns, and adjudge hell to the rebellious. In all those hundred and seven and twenty provinces king Ahasuerus hath no subjects but them. They obey out of conscience; others, out of fear. Why are they charged with that which they do most abhor? what can be the ground of this crimination? Ahasuerus commanded all knees to bow to Haman. A Jew only refuses. Malicious Haman! He that refuses to bow unto thee had sufficiently approved his loyalty to Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus had not been if Mordecai had not been a good subject. Hath the king no laws but what concern thine adoration? Set aside religion, (wherein the Jew is ready to present, if not active, yet passive obedience,) and name that Persian law which a Jew dares break. As I never yet read or heard of a conscionable Israelite that hath not passed under this calumniation, so I cannot yield him a true Israelite that deserves it. In vain doth he profess to acknowledge a God in heaven that denies homage to his deputy on earth.

It is not for the king's profit to suffer them. Worldly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit or loss; neither have they grace to know that nothing is profitable but what is honest, nothing so desperately incommodious as wickedness. They must needs offend by rule that measure all things by profit, and measure profit by their imagination. How easy is it to suggest strange untruths when there is nobody to make answer! False

Haman, how is it not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews? If thou construe this profit for honour, the king's honour is in the multitude of subjects, and what people more numerous than they? If for gain, the king's profit is in the largeness of his tributes; and what people are more deep in their payments? If for service, what people are more officious? How can it stand with the king's profit to bereave himself of subjects, his subjects of their lives, his exchequer of their tributes, his state of their defence? He is a weak politician that knows not to gild over the worst project with a pretence of public utility. No name under heaven hath made so many fools, so many villains, as this of profit.

Lastly, as Ahasuerus reaps nothing but disprofit by the lives of the Jews, so he shall reap no small profit by their deaths: *I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the king's treasury for this execution.* If revenge were not very sweet to the malicious man, he could not be content to purchase it at so high a rate. How do we see daily that the thirst hereof carries men to a riotous prodigality of estate, body, soul! Cruel Haman! if thou couldst have swimmed in a whole sea of Jewish blood, if thou couldst have raised mountains of their carcasses, if thou couldst have made all Persia thy shambles, who would have given thee one farthing for all those piles of flesh, for all those streams of blood? yea, who would not rather have been at charge for the avoiding of the annoyances of those slaughtered bodies which thou offerest to buy at ten thousand talents? It were an happy thing if charity could enlarge itself but so much as malice, if the preservation of mankind could be so much beholden to our bounty as the destruction.

Now when all these are laid together, the baseness and dispersedness of the people, the diversity of the laws, the irregularity of their government, the rebellion of their practice, the inconvenience of their toleration, the gain of their extirpation, what could the wit or art of man devise more insinuative, more likely to persuade? how could it be but Ahasuerus must needs think, since he could not suspect the ground of this suit, "What a zealous patriot have I raised, that can be content to buy off the incommodity of the state at his own charge! How worthy is he rather of the aid both of my power and purse! Why should I be feed to ease my kingdoms of rebels? *The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as seemeth good to thee.*" Without all delay the secretaries are called to write the warrants,

the king's ring is given to seal them, the posts are sent out to carry them into all provinces, the day set wherein all Jews of all ages, of both sexes, through the hundred and seven and twenty provinces of the king, shall be sacrificed to the wrath of Haman.

In all the carriage of Ahasuerus who sees not too much headiness of passion? Vashti is cast off for a trifle, the Jews are given to the slaughter for nothing; his rage in the one, his favour in the other, is too impotent. He is not a worse husband than a king.

The bare word of Haman is enough to kill so many subjects. No disposition can be more dangerous in great persons than violence of affection mixed with credulity.

O the seeming inequality of human conditions! *The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.* It is a woful thing to see great ones quaff the tears of the oppressed, and to hear them make music of shrieks.

With what lamentation, do we think, all the synagogues of Jews through the world received this fatal message of their proclaimed destruction! how do they bemoan themselves each to other! how do their conjoined cries fill heaven and earth!

But, above all, what sackcloth and ashes could suffice woful Mordecai, that found in himself the occasion of all this slaughter? What soul could be capable of more bitterness than he felt? while he could not but think, "Wretched man that I am! it is I that have brought all this calamity upon my nation; it is I that have been the ruin of my people. Woe is me, that ever I put myself into the court, into the service of a pagan. How unhappy was I to cast myself into these straits, that I must either honour an Agagite or draw a vengeance upon Israel! Yet how could I imagine that the flame of Haman's rage would have broken out so far? Might that revenge have determined in my blood, how happy should I have been! Now I have brought death upon many thousands of innocents that cannot know wherefore they die. Why did I not hide myself rather from the place of that proud Amalekite? Why did I stand out in contestation with so overpowerful an enemy? Alas! no man of Israel shall so much as live to curse me; only mine enemies shall record my name with ignominy, and say, 'Mordecai was the bane of his nation.' O that my zeal should have reserved me for so heavy a service! Where now are those vain ambitions wherewith I pleased myself

in this great match of Esther? How fondly did I hope by this undue means to raise myself and my people! Yea, is not this carnal presumption the quarrel that God hath against me? Do I not therefore smart from these pagans for that I secretly affected this uncircumcised alliance? Howsoever it be, yet, O God, what have thy people done? O, let it be thy just mercy that I may perish alone."

In these sad thoughts did Mordecai spend his heart while he walked mournfully in sackcloth before that gate wherein he was wont to sit. Now his habit bars his approach. No sackcloth might come within the court. Lo, that which is welcomest in the court of heaven is here excluded from the presence of this earthly royalty: *A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Neither did it a little add to the sorrow of Mordecai to hear the bitter insultations of his former monitors: "Did we not advise thee better? did we not fore-admonish thee of thy danger? See now the issue of thine obstinacy. Now see what it is for thine earthen pitcher to knock with brass. Now where is the man that would needs contest with Haman? Hast thou not now brought thy matters to a fair pass? Thy stomach had long owed thee a spite, and now it hath paid thee. Who can pity thy wilfulness? Since thou wouldst needs deride our counsel, we will take leave to laugh at thy sackcloth." Nothing but scorns and griefs and terrors present themselves to miserable Mordecai. All the external buffets of adversaries were slight, to the wounds that he hath made and felt in his own heart.

The perpetual intelligences that were closely held betwixt Esther and Mordecai could not suffer his public sorrow to be long concealed from her. The news of his sackcloth afflicts her ere she can suspect the cause. Her crown doth but clog her head while she hears of his ashes. True friendship transforms us into the condition of those we love, and, if it cannot raise them to our cheerfulness, draws us down to their dejection.

Fain would she uncase her foster-father of these mournful weeds, and change his sackcloth for tissue; that yet, at least, his clothes might not hinder his access to her presence for the free opening of his griefs.

It is but a slight sorrow that abides to take in outward comforts. Mordecai refuses that kind offer; and would have Esther see that

his affliction was such as that he might well resolve to put off his sackcloth and his skin at once; that he must mourn to death, rather than see her face to live.

The good queen is astonished with this constant humiliation of so dear a friend; and now she sends Hatach, a trusty though a pagan attendant, to inquire into the occasion of this so irremediable heaviness. It should seem Esther inquired not greatly into matters of state. That which perplexed all Shushan was not yet known to her. Her followers, not knowing her to be a Jewess, conceived not how the news might concern her, and therefore had forborne the relation. Mordecai first informs her, by her messenger, of the decree that was gone out against all her nation; of the day wherein they must all prepare to bleed; of the sum which Haman had proffered for their heads; and delivers the copy of that bloody edict; charging her now, if ever, to bestir herself; and to improve all her love, all her power with king Ahasuerus, in a speedy and humble supplication for the saving of the life (not of himself so much, as) of her people.

It was tidings able to confound a weak heart, and hers so much the more as she could apprehend nothing but impossibility of redress. She needs but to put Mordecai in mind of that which all the king's servants and subjects knew well enough, that the Persian law made it no less than death for whomsoever, man or woman, that should press into the inner court of the king uncalled. Nothing but the royal sceptre extended could keep that presumptuous offender from the grave. For her, thirty days were now past since she was called in to the king; an intermission that might be justly suspicious. Whether the heat of his first affection were thus soon, of itself, allayed towards her; or whether some suggestions of a secret enemy, perhaps his Agagite, might have set him off; or whether some more pleasing object may have laid hold on his eyes; whatever it might be, this absence could not but argue some strangeness, and this strangeness must needs imply a danger in her bold intrusion. She could bewail therefore, she could not hope to remedy this dismal day of her people.

This answer in the ears of Mordecai sounded truth, but weakness; neither can he take up with so feeble a return. These occasions require other spirits, other resolutions, which must be quickened by a more stirring reply: *Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if*

thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall the enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

The expectation of death had not quailed the strong heart of faithful Mordecai. Even while he mourns, his zeal droops not. There could have been no life in that breast which this message could not have roused.

"What then? Is it death that thou fearest in this attempt of thy supplication? What other than death awaits thee in the neglect of it? There is but this difference; sue, and thou mayest die; sue not, and thou must die. What blood hast thou but Jewish? And if these unalterable edicts exempt no living soul, what shall become of thine? And canst thou be so vainly timorous as to die for fear of death? to prefer certainty of danger before a possibility of hopes? Away with this weak cowardice, unworthy of an Israelite, unworthy of a queen. But if faintheartedness or private respects shall seal up thy lips, or withhold thine aid from the hand of thy people, if thou canst so far neglect God's Church, know thou that God will not neglect it. It shall not be in the power of tyrants to root out his chosen seed. That Holy One of Israel shall rather work miracles from heaven than his inheritance shall perish upon earth. And how just shall it then be for that jealous God to take vengeance upon thee and thy father's house, for this cold unhelpfulness to his distressed Church! Suffer me therefore to adjure thee, by all that tenderness of love wherewith I have trained up thine orphan infancy; by all those dear and thankful respects which thou hast vowed to me again; by the name of the God of Israel whom we serve; that thou awaken and stir up thy holy courage, and dare to adventure thy life for the saving of many. It hath pleased the Almighty to raise thee up to that height of honour which our progenitors could little expect; why shouldst thou be wanting to him that hath been so bountiful to thee? yea, why should I not think that God hath put this very act into the intendment of thine exaltation, having on purpose thus seasonably hoisted thee up to the throne, that thou mayest rescue his poor Church from an utter ruin?"

O the admirable faith of Mordecai, that shines through all these clouds, and in the thickest of these fogs descries a cheerful glimpse of deliverance! He saw the day of their common destruc-

tion enacted; he knew the Persian decrees to be unalterable; but withal he knew there was a Messias to come. He was so well acquainted with God's covenanted assurances to his Church, that he can through the midst of those bloody resolutions foresee indemnity to Israel; rather trusting the promises of God than the threats of men. This is the victory that overcomes all the fears and fury of the world, even our faith.

It is quarrel enough against any person or community not to have been aidful to the distresses of God's people. Not to ward the blow, if we may, is construed for little better than striking. Till we have tried our utmost, we know not whether we have done that we came for.

Mordecai hath said enough. These words have so put a new life into Esther, that she is resolute to hazard the old; *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.* Heroical thoughts do well befit great actions. Life can never be better adventured than where it shall be gain to lose it. There can be no law against the humble deprecation of evils. Where the necessity of God's Church calls to us, no danger should withhold us from all honest means of relief. Deep humiliations must make way for the success of great enterprises. We are most capable of mercy when we are thoroughly empty. A short hunger doth but whet the appetite, but so long an abstinence meets death half way to prevent it. Well may they enjoin sharp penances unto others who practise it upon themselves.

It was the face of Esther that must hope to win Ahasuerus, yet that shall be macerated with fasting that she may prevail. A carnal heart would have pampered the flesh, that it might allure those wanton eyes; she pines it, that she may please. God, and not she, must work the heart of the king. Faith teaches her rather to trust her devotions than her beauty.

ESTHER SUING TO AHASUERUS.—Esther v.

The Jews are easily entreated to fast, who had received in themselves the sentence of death. What pleasure could they take in meat that know what day they must eat their last?

The three days of abstinence are expired. Now Esther changes

her spirits no less than her clothes. Who that sees that face and that habit can say she had mourned, she had fasted? Never did her royal apparel become her so well. That God, before whom she had humbled herself, made her so much more beautiful as she had been more dejected.

And now with a winning confidence she walks into the inner court of the king, and puts herself into that forbidden presence, as if she said, "Here I am, with my life in my hand. If it please the king to take it, it is ready for him. Vashti, my predecessor, forfeited her place for not coming when she was called. Esther shall now hazard the forfeiture of her life for coming when she is not called. It is necessity, not disobedience, that hath put me upon this bold approach. According to thy construction, O king, I do either live or die: either shall be welcome."

The unexpectedness of pleasing objects makes them many times the more acceptable. The beautiful countenance, the graceful demeanour, and goodly presence of Esther, have no sooner taken the eyes, than they have ravished the heart of king Ahasuerus. Love hath soon banished all dreadfulness; *and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand.* Moderate intermission is so far from cooling the affection, that it inflames it. Had Esther been seen every day, perhaps that satiety had abated of the height of her welcome; now three and thirty days' retiredness hath endeared her more to the surfeited eyes of Ahasuerus.

Had not the golden sceptre been held out, where had queen Esther been? The Persian kings affected a stern awfulness to their subjects: it was death to solicit them uncalled. How safe, how easy, how happy a thing it is, to have to do with the King of heaven, who is so pleased with our access that he solicits suitors; who, as he is unweariable with our requests, so is he infinite in his beneficences!

How gladly doth Esther touch the top of that sceptre by which she holds her life! and now, while she thinks it well that she may live, she receives, besides pardon, favour: *What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, even to the half of the kingdom.* Commonly, when we fear most we speed best. God then most of all magnifies his bounty to us when we have most afflicted ourselves. Over-confident expectations are seldom but disappointed, while humble suspicions go laughing away. It was the benefit and safety of but one piece of the kingdom that Esther comes to sue for; and behold Aha-

suerus offers her the free power of the half. He that gave Haman at the first word the lives of all his Jewish subjects is ready to give Esther half his kingdom ere she ask. Now she is no less amazed at the loving munificence of Ahasuerus than she was before afraid of his austerity. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

It is not good to swallow favours too greedily, lest they either choke us in the passage or prove hard of digestion. The wise queen, however she might seem to have a fair opportunity offered to her suit, finds it not good to apprehend it too suddenly; as desiring by this small dilation to prepare the ear and heart of the king for so important a request.

Now, all her petition ends in a banquet; *If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.* It is an easy favour to receive a small courtesy where we offer to give great. Haman is called, the king comes to Esther's table; and now, highly pleased with his entertainment, he himself solicits her to propound that suit for which her modesty would, but durst not solicit him. Bashfulness shall lose nothing at the hand of well-governed greatness.

Yet still Esther's suit sticks in her teeth, and dares not come forth without a further preface of time and expectation. Another banquet must pass ere this reckoning can be given in: other suitors wait long for the delivery of their petition, longer for the receipt of their answer; here the king is fain to wait for his suit. Whether Esther's heart would not yet serve her to contest with so strong an adversary as Haman without further recollection; or whether she desired to get better hold of the king by endearing him with so pleasing entertainments; or whether she would thus ripen her hopes by working in the mind of king Ahasuerus a foreconceit of the greatness and difficulty of that suit which was so loath to come forth; or whether she meant thus to give scope to the pride and malice of Haman, for his more certain ruin; howsoever it were, to morrow is a new day set for Esther's second banquet and third petition.

The king is not invited without Haman. Favours are sometimes done to men with a purpose of displeasure. Doubtless Haman tasteth of the same cates with his master; neither could he in the forehead of Esther read any other characters than of respect and kind applause; yet had she then, in her hopes, designed

him to a just revenge. Little do we know by outward carriages in what terms we stand with either God or man.

Every little wind raiseth up a bubble. How is Haman now exalted in himself with the singular graces of queen Esther, and begins to value himself so much more as he sees himself higher in the rate of others' opinion.

Only surly and sullen Mordecai is an allay to his happiness. No edict of death can bow the knees of that stout Jew; yea, the notice of that bloody cruelty of this Agagite hath stiffened them so much the more. Before, he looked at Haman as an Amalekite, now as a persecutor. Disdain and anger look out at those eyes, and bid that proud enemy do his worst. No doubt Mordecai had been listening after the speed of queen Esther; how she came in to the king; how she was welcomed with the golden sceptre and with the more precious words of Ahasuerus; how she had entertained the king; how she pleased: the news had quit his sackcloth, and raised his courage to a more scornful neglect of his professed adversary.

Haman comes home, I know not whether more full of pride or of rage, calls an inward council of his choice friends, together with his wife; makes a glorious report of all his wealth, magnificence, height of favour both with the king and queen; and, at last, after all his sunshine, sets in this cloudy epilogue, *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.* It is seldom seen that God allows even to the greatest darlings of the world a perfect contentment. Something they must have to complain of, that shall give an unsavoury verdure to their sweetest morsels, and make their very felicity miserable.

The wit of women hath wont to be noted for more sudden and more sharp. Zeresh, the wife of Haman, sets on foot that motion of speedy revenge which is applauded by the rest: *Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou to the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.*

I do not hear them say, "Be patient a while. Thou hast already set Mordecai his last day. The month Adar will not be long in coming. The determination of his death hath made him desperate. Let him in the mean time eat his own heart in envy at thy greatness." But they rather advise of a quick despatch. Malice is a thing full of impatience, and hates delay of execution next unto mercy.

While any grudge lies at the heart, it cannot be freely cheerful. Forced smiles are but the hypocrisy of mirth. How happy were it for us, if we could be so zealously careful to remove the hinderances of our true spiritual joy, those stubborn corruptions that will not stoop to the power of grace!

MORDECAI HONOURED BY HAMAN.—Esther vi.

The wit of Zeresh had like to have gone beyond the wit of Esther. Had not the working providence of the Almighty contrived these events beyond all hopes, all conceits, Mordecai had been despatched ere Esther's second banquet. To morrow was the day pitched for both their designs. Had not the stream been unexpectedly turned, in vain had the queen blamed her delays; Mordecai's breakfast had prevented Esther's dinner; for certainly he that had given to Haman so many thousand lives would never have made dainty, upon the same suit, to anticipate one of those whom he had condemned to the slaughter. But God meant better things to his Church, and fetches about all his holy purposes after a wonderful fashion in the very instant of opportunity; *He that keepeth Israel, and neither slumbereth nor sleepeth*, causeth sleep that night to depart from him that had decreed to root out Israel.

Great Ahasuerus, that commanded an hundred and seven and twenty provinces, cannot command an hour's sleep. Poverty is rather blessed with the freedom of rest than wealth and power. Cares and surfeit withhold that from the great which presseth upon the spare diet and labour of the meanest. Nothing is more tedious than an eager pursuit of denied sleep; which, like to a shadow, flies away so much faster as it is more followed. Experience tells us that this benefit is best solicited by neglect, and soonest found when we have forgotten to seek it.

Whether to deceive the time or to bestow it well, Ahasuerus shall spend his restless hours in the Chronicles of his time. Nothing is more requisite for princes than to look back upon their own actions and events, and those of their predecessors. The examination of forepast actions makes them wise; of events, thankful and cautelous.

Amongst those voluminous registers of acts and monuments,

which so many scores of provinces must needs yield, the book shall open upon Mordecai's discovery of the late treason of the two eunuchs: the reader is turned thither by an insensible sway of Providence. Our most arbitrary or casual actions are overruled by a hand in heaven.

The king now feels afresh the danger of that conspiracy; and, as great spirits abide not to smother or bury good offices, inquires into the recompense of so loyal a service; *What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?* Surely Mordecai did but his duty. He had heinously sinned if he had not revealed this wicked treachery; yet Ahasuerus takes thought for his remuneration. How much more careful art thou, O God of all mercies, to reward the weak obedience of thine at the best unprofitable servants!

That which was intended to procure rest sets it off. King Ahasuerus is unquiet in himself, to think that so great a merit should lie but so long neglected; neither can he find any peace in himself till he have given order for a speedy retribution. Hearing therefore by his servants that Haman was below in the court, he sends for him up, to consult with him, *what should be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*

O marvellous concurrence of circumstances, drawn together by the infinite wisdom and power of the Almighty! Who but Haman should be the man? And when should Haman be called to advise of Mordecai's honour, but in the very instant when he came to sue for Mordecai's hanging? Had Ahasuerus but slept that night, Mordecai had been that morning advanced fifty cubits higher than the earth, ere the king could have remembered to whom he was beholden.

What shall we say, then, to reconcile these cross passions in Ahasuerus? Before he signed that decree of killing all the Jews, he could not but know that a Jew had saved his life; and now, after that he had enacted the slaughter of all Jews as rebels, he is giving order to honour a Jew as his preserver. It were strange if great persons, in the multitude of their distractions, should not let fall some incongruities.

Yet who can but think that king Ahasuerus meant, upon some second thoughts, to make amends to Mordecai?

Neither can he choose but put these two together; "The Jews are appointed to death at the suit of Haman: this Mordecai is a Jew; how then can I do more grace to him that hath saved my

life than to command him to be honoured by that man who would spill his?"

When Haman heard himself called up to the bedchamber of his master, he thinks himself too happy in so early an opportunity of presenting his suit; but yet more in the pleasing question of Ahasuerus; wherein he could not but imagine that favour forced itself upon him with strange importunity; for how could he conceive that any intention of more than ordinary honour could fall besides himself? Self-love, like to a good stomach, draws to itself what nourishment it likes, and casts off that which offends it.

Haman will be sure to be no niggard in advising those ceremonies of honour which he thinks meant to his own person. Could he have once dreamed that this grace had been purposed to any under heaven besides himself, he had not been so lavish in counselling so pompous a show of excessive magnificence. Now the king's own royal apparel and his own steed are not sufficient, except the royal crown also make up the glory of him who shall thus triumph in the king's favour. Yet all this were nothing in base hands. The actor shall be the best part of this great pageant: *Let this apparel and this horse be delivered to one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.* Honour is more in him that gives than him that receives it. To be honoured by the unworthy is little better than disgrace. No meaner person will serve to attend this Agagite in his supposed greatness than one of the noblest princes. The ambition is too highflown that seeks glory in the servility of equals. The place adds much to the act. There is small heart in a concealed honour. It is nothing unless the streets of the city of Shushan be witnesses of this pomp, and ring with that gracious acclamation. The vain hearts of proud men can easily devise those means whereby they may best set out themselves. O that we would equally affect the means of true and immortal glory!

The heart of man is never so cold within him as when, from the height of the expectation of good, it falls into a sudden sense of evil. So did this Agagite. *Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the*

king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast said. How was Haman thunderstricken with this killing word, *Do thou so to Mordecai!* I dare say all the honours that Ahasuerus had heaped upon Haman cannot countervail this one vexation.

Doubtless, at first, he distrusts his ear; and then muses, whether the king be in earnest: at last, when he hears the charge so seriously doubled, and finds himself forced to believe it, he begins to think, "What means this inconceivable alteration? Is there no man in all the court of Persia to be picked out for extraordinary honour but Mordecai? Is there no man to be picked out for the performance of this honour to him but Haman? Have I but one proud enemy in all the world, and am I singled out to grace him? Did it gall me to the heart, and make all my happiness tedious to me, to see that this Jew would not bow to me, and must I now bow to him? That which he would rather die, and forfeit the life of all his nation, than do to me, notwithstanding the king's command; shall I be forced, by the king's command, to do unto him? Yea, did he refuse to give but a cap and a knee to my greatness, and must I lacquey so base a fellow through the streets: must I be his herald, to proclaim his honour through all Shushan? Why do I not let the king know the insolent affronts that he hath offered me? why do I not signify to my sovereign that my errand now was for another kind of advancement to Mordecai? If I obtain not my desired revenge, yet at least I shall prevail so far as to exempt myself from this officious attendance upon so an unequal an enemy. And yet that motion cannot be now safe. I see the king's heart is, upon what ground soever, bent upon this action. Should I fly off never so little, after my word so directly passed, perhaps my coldness or opposition might be construed as some wayward contestation with my master; especially since the service that Mordecai hath done to the king is of a higher nature than the despite which he hath done to me. I will, I must give way for the time. Mine humble yieldance, when all the carriage of this business shall be understood, shall, I doubt not, make way for mine intended revenge. Mordecai, I will honour thee now, that, by these steps, I may ere long raise thee many cubits higher. I will obey the command of my sovereign in observing thee, that he may reward the merit of my loyalty in thine execution."

Thus resolved, Haman goes forth with a face and heart full of distraction, full of confusion; and addresses himself to the

attiring, to the attending of his old adversary and new master Mordecai.

What looks, do we now think, were cast upon each other, at their first greeting! Their eyes had not forgotten their old language. Certainly, when Mordecai saw Haman come into the room where he was, he could not but think, "This man hath long thirsted for my blood, and now he comes to fetch it. I shall not live to see the success of Esther, or the fatal day of my nation." It was known that morning in the court what a lofty gibbet Haman had provided for Mordecai; and why might it not have come to Mordecai's ear? What could he therefore now imagine other than that he was called out to that execution? But when he saw the royal robe that Haman brought to him, he thinks, "Is it not enough for this man to kill me, but he must mock me too? What an addition is this to the former cruelty, thus to insult and play upon my last distress!" But when he yet saw the royal crown ready to be set on his head, and the king's own horse richly furnished at his gate, and found himself raised by princely hands to that royal seat, he thinks, "What may all this mean? is it the purpose of mine adversary that I shall die in state? would he have me hanged in triumph?" At last, when he sees such a train of Persian peers attending him, with a grave reverence, and hears Haman proclaim before him, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour;* finding this pomp to be serious and well meant, he imagines, in all likelihood, that this unexpected change proceeds from the suit of his Esther. Now he begins to lift up his head, and to hope well of himself and his people; and could not but say within himself, that he had not fasted for nothing.

O the wondrous alteration that one morning hath made in the court of Persia! he that was yesternight despised by Haman's footmen, is now waited on by Haman and all his fellow princes: he that yesternight had the homage of all knees but one, and was ready to burst for the lack of that, now doth obeisance to that one by whom he was wilfully neglected. It was not Ahasuerus that wrought this strange mutation: it was the overruling power of the Almighty, whose immediate hand would thus prevent Esther's suit, that he might challenge all the thank to himself. While princes have their own wills, they must do his; and shall either exalt or depress, according to divine appointment.

I should commend Haman's obedience in his humble condescent to so unpleasing and harsh a command of his master, were

it not that either he durst do no other, or that he thus stooped for an advantage. It is a thankless respect that is either forced or for ends. True subjection is free and absolute, out of the conscience of duty, not out of fear or hopes.

All Shushan is in amaze at this sudden glory of Mordecai, and studies how to reconcile this day with the thirteenth of Adar.

Mordecai had reason to hope well. It could not stand with the honour of the king to kill him whom he saw cause to advance; neither could this be any other than the beginning of a durable promotion; otherwise, what recompense had an hour's riding been to so great a service?

On the other side, Haman droops, and hath changed passions with Mordecai. Neither was that Jew ever more deeply afflicted with the decree of his own death than this Agagite was with that Jew's honour. How heavy doth it lie at Haman's heart that no tongue but his might serve to proclaim Mordecai happy! Even the greatest minions of the world must have their turns of sorrow. With a covered head and a dejected countenance doth he hasten home, and longs to impart his grief where he had received his advice.

It was but cold comfort that he finds from his wife Zeresh and his friends; *If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.* Out of the mouth of pagans, O God, thou hast ordained strength, that thou mayest still the enemy and the avenger. What credit hath thy great name won with these barbarous nations, that they can out of all experience make maxims of thine undoubted protection of thy people, and the certain ruin of their adversaries! Men find no difference in themselves. The face of a Jew looks so like other men's, that Esther and Mordecai were not of long taken for what they were. He that made them makes the distinction betwixt them; so as a Jew may fall before a Persian, and get up and prevail; but if a Persian, or whosoever of the Gentiles, begin to fall before a Jew, he can neither stay nor rise. There is an invisible hand of Omnipotency that strikes in for his own, and confounds their opposites. O God, neither is thy hand shortened nor thy bowels straitened in thee. Thou art still and ever thyself. If we be thy true spiritual Israel, neither earth nor hell shall prevail against us. We shall either stand sure or surely rise while our enemies shall lick the dust.

HAMAN HANGED; MORDECAI ADVANCED.

Esther vii, viii, ix.

Haman's day is now come. That vengeance which hath hitherto slept is now awake, and rouseth up itself to a just execution. That heavy morning was but the preface to his last sorrow, and the sad presage of friends is verified in the speaking. While the word was in their mouths the messengers were at the door to fetch Haman to his funeral banquet.

How little do we know what is towards us! *As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*

It was, as Haman conceived, the only privilege of his dearness, and the comfort of his present heaviness, that he only was called with the king to Esther's banquet, when this only was meant for his bane. The face of this invitation is fair, and promiseth much; and now the ingenuous man begins to set good constructions upon all events. "Surely," thinks he, "the king was tied in his honour to give some public gratification to Mordecai. So good an office could deserve no less than an hour's glory. But little doth my master know what terms there are betwixt me and Mordecai. Had he fully understood the insolencies of this Jew, and should notwithstanding have enjoined me to honour him, I might have had just cause to complain of disgrace and disparagement; but now, since all this business hath been carried in ignorance and casualty, why do I wrong myself in being too much affected with that which was not ill meant? Had either the king or queen abated aught of their favour to me, I might have dined at home: now this renewed invitation argues me to stand right in the grace of both: and why may not I hope this day to meet with a good occasion of my desired revenge? How just will it seem to the king, that the same man whom he hath publicly rewarded for his loyalty should now be publicly punished for his disobedience?"

With such like thoughts Haman cheers up himself, and addresseth himself to the royal banquet with a countenance that would fain seem to forget his morning's task. Esther works her face to an unwilling smile upon that hateful guest, and the king, as not inguilty of any dignity that he hath put upon his favourite, frames himself to as much cheerfulness as his want of rest would permit. The table is royally furnished with all delicate confec-

tions, with all pleasing liquors. King Ahasuerus so eats as one that both knew he was and meant to make himself welcome, Haman so pours in as one that meant to drown his cares.

And now, in this fulness of cheer, the king hungers for that long-delayed suit of queen Esther. Thrice hath he graciously called for it; and, as a man constant to his own favours, thrice hath he in the same words vowed the performance of it, though to the half of his kingdom. It falls out oftentimes, that when large promises fall suddenly from great persons they abate by leisure, and shrink upon cold thoughts: here king Ahasuerus is not more liberal in his offer than firm in his resolutions, as if his first word had been like his law, unalterable. I am ashamed to miss that steadiness in Christians which I find in a pagan. It was a great word that he had said, yet he eats it not, as overlavishly spoken, but doubles and trebles it with hearty assurances of a real prosecution; while those tongues which profess the name of the true God say and unsay at pleasure, recanting their good purposes, contradicting their own just engagements upon no cause but their own changeableness.

It is not for queen Esther to drive off any longer. The same wisdom that taught her to defer her suit now teaches her to propound it. A well-chosen season is the greatest advantage of any actions, which as it is seldom found in haste, so is too often lost in delay. Now therefore, with an humble and graceful obeisance, and with a countenance full of modest fear and sad gravity, she so delivers her petition, that the king might see it was necessity that both forced it upon her and wrung it from her: *If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.*

Expectation is either a friend or an enemy, according to the occasion. Ahasuerus looked for some high and difficult boon: now that he hears his queen beg for her life, it could not be but that the surplusage of his love to her must be turned into fury against her adversary, and his zeal must be so much more to her as her suit was more meek and humble: *For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.*

Crafty men are sometimes choked with their own plots. It was

the proffer of ten thousand talents wherewith Haman hoped both to purchase his intended revenge and the reputation of a worthy patriot. That sum is now laid in his dish for a just argument of malicious corruption; for well might Esther plead, "If we Jews deserved death, what needed our slaughter to be bought out? and if we deserved it not, what horrible cruelty was it to set a price upon innocent blood? It is not any offence of ours; it is only the despite of an enemy that hath wrought our destruction."

Besides now it appears the king was abused by misinformation. The adversary suggested that the life of the Jews could not stand with the king's profit, whereas their very bondage should be more damage to the state than all Haman's worth could countervail. Truth may be smothered, but it cannot die; it may be disguised, but it will be known; it may be suppressed, but it will triumph.

But what shall we say to so harsh an aggravation? Could Esther have been silent in a case of decreed bondage who is now so vehement in a case of death? Certainly to a generous nature death is far more easy than bondage; why should she have endured the greater, and yet so abhors the less? Was it for that the Jews were already too well inured to captivity, and those evils are more tolerable wherewith we are acquainted? or was it for that there may be hopes in bondage, none in death? Surely either of them were lamentable, and such as might deserve her humblest deprecation.

The queen was going on to have said, "But alas! nothing will satisfy our bloody enemy save the utter extirpation of me and my nation," when the impatient rage of the king interrupts her sentence in the midst, and, as if he had heard too much already, and could too easily supply the residue of her complaint, snatches the word out of her mouth with a furious demand, *Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?* It was the interest of queen Esther's person that raised this storm in Ahasuerus. Set that aside, how quietly, how merrily, was the determined massacre of the Jews formerly digested! Actions have not the same face when we look upon them with contrary affections.

Now queen Esther musters up her inward forces, and with an undaunted courage fixing her angry eyes upon that hated Agagite, she says, *The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.* The word was loath to come forth, but it strikes home at the last.

Never till now did Haman hear his true title. Before, some had

styled him 'noble,' others 'great;' some 'magnificent,' and some perhaps 'virtuous;' only Esther gives him his own, *wicked Haman.* Ill deserving greatness doth in vain promise to itself a perpetuity of applause. If our ways be foul, the time shall come, when, after all vain flattery, after all our momentary glory, our sins shall be ripped up, and our iniquities laid before us, to our utter confusion.

With what consternation did Haman now stand! How do we think he looked to hear himself thus enstiled, thus accused, yea, thus condemned? Certainly death was in his face and horror in every of his joints. No sense, no limb knows his office. Fain would he speak, but his tongue falters, and his lips tremble. Fain would he make apologies upon his knees, but his heart fails him, and tells him the evidence is too great, and the offence above all pardon. Only guiltiness and fear look through his eyes upon the enraged countenance of his master, which now bodes nothing to him but revenge and death.

In what a passionate distemper doth this banquet shut up! King Ahasuerus flies from the table as if he had been hurried away with a tempest; his wrath is too great to come forth at his mouth, only his eyes tell Haman that he hates to see him, and vows to see his despatch.

For solitariness, and not for pleasure, doth he now walk into his garden, and thinks with himself, "What a monster have I favoured! Is it possible that so much cruelty and presumption should harbour in a breast that I thought ingenuous? Could I be so bewitched as to pass so bloody a decree? Is my credulity thus abused by the treacherous subtlety of a miscreant whom I trusted? I confess it was my weak rashness to yield unto so prodigious a motion; but it was the villany of this Agagite to circumvent me by false suggestions. He shall pay for my error. The world shall see that as I exceeded in grace so I will not come short in justice. Haman, thy guilty blood shall expiate that innocent blood which thy malice might have shed."

In the mean time Haman, so soon as ever he could recover the qualm of his astonishment, finding himself left alone with the queen Esther, loseth no time, spareth no breath to mitigate her anger, which had made way to his destruction. Doubtless with many vows and tears and dejerations he labours to clear his intentions to her person; bewailing his danger, imploring her mercy, confessing the unjust extent of his malice, proffering endeavours of

satisfaction: "Wretched man that I am, I am condemned before I speak; and when I have spoken, I am condemned. Upon thy sentence, O queen, I see death awaits for me. In vain shall I seek to avoid it. It is thy will that I should perish, but let that little breath I have left acquit me so far with thee, as to call heaven and earth to record, that in regard of thee I die innocent. It is true that mine impetuous malice miscarried me against the nation of the Jews for the sake of one stubborn offender; but did I know there was the least drop of Israelitish blood in thy sacred person? could I suspect that Mordecai or that people did aught concern thee? Let not one death be enough for me, if I would ever have entertained any thought of evil against nation or man that should have cost but a frown from thee. All the court of Persia can sufficiently witness how I have magnified and adored thee ever since the royal crown was set on thy head, neither did I ever fail to do thee all good offices unto that my sovereign master, whom thou hast now mortally incensed against me. O queen, no hand can save my life but thine, that hath as good as bereaved it. Shew mercy to him that never meant but loyalty to thee. As ever thou wouldest oblige an humble and faithful vassal to thee, as ever thou wouldest honour thy name and sex with the praise of tender compassion, take pity upon me, and spare that life which shall be vowed to thy service; and whereas thy displeasure may justly allege against me that rancorous plot for the extirpation of that people whom I, too late, know to be thine; let it suffice that I hate, I curse mine own cruelty, and only upon that condition shall beg the reprieval of my life, that I shall work and procure, by thy gracious aid, a full defeasance of that unjust execution. O! let fall upon thy despairing servant one word of favour to my displeased master, that I may yet live."

While he was speaking to this purpose, having prostrated himself for the more humility before the queen, and spread his arms in a vehement imploration up to her bed, the king comes in; and, as not unwilling to misconstrue the posture of him whom he now hated, says, "What, *will he force the queen also before me in the house?*" That which Haman meant as an humble suppliant is interpreted as from a presumptuous offender. How oft might he have done so, and more, while he was in favour, uncensured! Actions are not the same when the man alters: as charity makes a good sense of doubtful occurrents, so prejudice and displeasure

take all things, though well meant, at the worst. It is an easy thing to pick a quarrel where we intend a mischief.

The wrath of the king is as a messenger of death. While these words were yet in the mouth of Ahasuerus, Haman, in turning his head toward the king, is suddenly muffled for his execution. He shall no more see either face or sun; he shall be seen no more, but as a spectacle of shame and horror.

And now he thinks, "Woe is me, whose eyes serve me only to foresee the approach of a dishonourable and painful death! What am I the better to have been great? O that I had never been! O that I could not be! How too truly have Zeresh and my friends foretold me of this heavy destiny! Now am I ready to feel what it is that I meant to thousands of innocents. I shall die with pain and ignominy. O that the conscience of mine intended murder could die with me!"

It is no marvel if wicked men find nothing but utter discomforts in their end. Rather than fail, their former happiness shall join with their imminent miseries to torment them. It is the just judgment of God, that presumptuous sinners should be swallowed up of those evils which they would not fear. Happy is that man who hath grace to foresee and avoid those ways which will lead him to a perfect confusion: happy is he that hath so lived, that he can either welcome death as a friend or defy it as an enemy.

Who was ever the better for favour past? Those that had before kissed the feet and smiled in the face of Haman are now as ready to cover his head and help him to the gallows. Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, seasonably tells the king how stately a gibbet Haman had newly set up for well-deserving Mordecai within his own palace. I hear not one man open his mouth to intercede for the offender, to pacify the king, to excuse or lessen the fact. Every one is ready to pull him down that is falling; to trample on him that is down; yet, no doubt, there were some of these courtiers whom Haman had obliged. Had the cause been better, thus it would have been. Every cur is ready to fall upon the dog that he sees worried. But here it was the just hand of God to set off all hearts from a man that had been so unreasonably merciless; and to raise up enemies, even among friends, to him that had professed enmity to God's Church. So let thine enemies perish, O Lord, unsuccoured, unpitied.

Then the king said, Hang him thereon. There can be no truer justice than in retaliation. Who can complain of his own measure? *Behold, the wicked travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch that he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.*

There hangs Haman, in more reproach than ever he stood in honour; and Mordecai, who is now first known for what he was, succeeds his favour, and changes inheritances with his enemy; for while Haman inherits the gibbet of Mordecai, Mordecai inherits the house and honour of Haman. *O Lord, let the malice of the wicked come to an end; but establish thou the just.*

One hour hath changed the face of the Persian court. What stability is there in earthly greatness? He whom in the morning all knees bowed unto, as more than a man, now hangs up, like a despised vermin, for a prey to the ravens. He who this morning was destined to the gallows now rules over princes; neither was it for nothing that he this day rode in triumph. The king's ring, that was taken from Haman, is now given to Mordecai, as the pledge of his authority; and he that even now sat in the gate is called up next to the throne. Wickedness and honest innocence have now paid their debts to both their clients.

Little joy would it yet have been to Esther that her enemy was dead, her kinsman advanced, if still her people must for all this expect their fatal day. Her next suit therefore is for the safety of her nation in the countermand of that bloody decree which Haman had obtained against them. That, which was surreptitiously gotten and rashly given, is so much more gladly reversed, by how much mercy is more pleasing to a good nature than cruel injustice. Mordecai hath power to indite, seal, send out letters of favour to the Jews which were causelessly sentenced to the slaughter. If a Persian law might not be reversed, yet it might be counterchanged. Mordecai may not write, "Let no Jew be slain," he may write, "Let the Jews meet, and stand for their lives against those that would slay them." This command flies after the former so fast, as if it would overtake that which it cannot recall. The Jews are revived with this happy tidings, that they may have protection as well as enmity; that authority will not be their executioner; that their own hands are allowed to be their avengers.

Who would imagine, that after public notice of this alteration

at the court, when the world could not choose but know the malicious ground of that wrongful edict, the shameful death of the procurer, the power of the party opposite, any one should be found throughout all the provinces that would once lift up his hand against a Jew? that with his own danger would endeavour to execute a controlled decree? The Church of God should cease to be itself if it wanted malicious persecution. There needs no other quarrel than the name, the religion of Israel.

Notwithstanding the known favour of the king and the patronage of Mordecai, the thirteenth of Adar is meant to be a bloody day. Haman hath too many abettors in the Persian dominions. These join together to perform that sentence whereof the author repented. The Jews take heart to defend themselves, to kill their murderers. All the provinces are turned into a field of civil war, wherein innocence vanquisheth malice. The Jews are victors; and not only are alive, but are feared. The most resist them not; many assist them, and some become theirs. The countenance of the great leads the world at pleasure. Fear of authority sways thousands that are not guilty of a conscience.

Yea, besides the liberty of defence, the Jews are now made their own justices. That there may be none left from the loins of that accursed Agagite, who would have left none of the Jewish seed, they slay the ten sons of Haman, and obtain new days of further executions. Neither can death satisfy their revenge. Those ten sons of Haman shall in their very carcasses bear the reproach of their father, and hang aloft upon his gallows.

Finally, no man doth, no man dares frown upon a Jew. They are now become lords in the midst of their captivity. No marvel if they ordain and celebrate their joyful Purim for a perpetual memory to all posterities of their happy deliverance. It were pity that the Church of God should not have sunshines as well as storms and should not meet with interchanges of joy in their warfare before they enter upon the unchangeable joy of their endless triumph.

CONTEMPLATIONS

UPON

THE HISTORY OF

THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

THE FIRST VOLUME.

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY,

CHARLES,

BY THE GRACE OF GOD KING OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, AND IRELAND, DEFENDER OF THE FAITH.

Most Gracious and Dread Sovereign,—More than twenty years are slipped away since I entered upon this task of sacred Contemplations; presuming so long ago to prefix your Royal Name to some of the first pieces of this long work, which I rather wished than hoped I might live to finish. The God of heaven hath been pleased to stretch out my days so far as to see it brought at last, after many necessary intermissions, to an happy end. Now, not with more contentment than boldness, I bring to your sacred hands, besides variety of other discourses, that work complete, whereof some few parcels saw the light before, under subordinate dedications. The whole is your Majesty's due, no less than the unworthy Author; whose age pleaseth and prideth itself in nothing more than the title of one of your Majesty's most ancient attendants, in my station, now living.

JOS. EXON.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK I.

TO MY MUCH HONOURED AND RIGHT WORSHIPFUL FRIEND,

SIR HENRY YELVERTON, KNIGHT,

ATTORNEY GENERAL TO HIS MAJESTY [a].

Right Worshipful,—It is not out of any satiety that I change from the Old Testament to the New. These two, as they are the Breasts of the Church, so they yield milk equally wholesome, equally pleasant, unto able nurslings. Herein I thought good to have respect unto my reader, in whose strength there may be difference. That other breast perhaps doth not let down this nourishing liquor so freely, so easily. Even so small a variety refresheth a weak infant. Neither will there perhaps want some palates which will find a more quick and pleasing relish in this fresher substance. These I thought good to please with a taste, ere they come to sate themselves with a full meal of this divine nourishment; in emulation of the good scribe that brings forth both old and new. If it please God to enable my life and opportunities, I hope at last to present this Church with the last service of the history of either page, wherein my joy and my crown shall be the edification of many. In the mean time I dedicate this part unto your name, whom I have so much cause to observe and honour. The blessing of that God, whose Church you have ever made your chief client, be still upon your head, and that honourable Society which rejoices in so worthy a leader. To it and yourself I shall be ever, as I have cause,

Humbly and unfeignedly devoted,

JOS. HALL.

THE ANGEL AND ZACHARY.—Luke i.

When things are at worst then God begins a change. The state of the Jewish church was extremely corrupted immediately before the news of the Gospel; yet, as bad as it was, not only the priesthood, but the courses of attendance continued, even from David's time till Christ's. It is a desperately depraved condition of a Church where no good orders are left.

Judea passed many troubles, many alterations, yet this orderly combination endured about an eleven hundred years. A settled

[a] [Afterwards, 1617, a puisne Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.]

good will not easily be defeated, but in the change of persons will remain unchanged; and if it be forced to give way, leaves memorable footsteps behind it. If David foresaw the perpetuation of this holy ordinance, how much did he rejoice in the knowledge of it! Who would not be glad to do good on condition that it may so long outlive him?

The successive turns of the legal ministration held on in a line never interrupted. Even in a forlorn and miserable Church there may be a personal succession. How little were the Jews better for this, when they had lost the Urim and Thummim, sincerity of doctrine and manners! This stayed with them even while they and their sons crucified Christ. What is more ordinary than wicked sons of holy parents? It is the succession of truth and holiness that makes or institutes a Church, whatever become of the persons.

Never times were so barren as not to yield some good. The greatest dearth affords some few good ears to the gleaners. Christ would not have come into the world but he would have some faithful to entertain him. He that had the disposing of all times and men would cast some holy ones into his own times. There had been no equality that all should either overrun or follow him and none attend him.

Zachary and Elizabeth are just, both of Aaron's blood, and John Baptist of theirs. Whence should a holy seed spring, if not of the loins of Levi? It is not in the power of parents to traduce holiness to their children: it is the blessing of God that feoffs them in the virtues of their parents, as they feoff them in their sins. There is no certainty, but there is likelihood, of an holy generation when the parents are such.

Elizabeth was just as well as Zachary, that the forerunner of a Saviour might be holy on both sides. If the stock and the griff be not both good, there is much danger of the fruit. It is an happy match when the husband and the wife are one, not only in themselves but in God, not more in flesh than in the spirit. Grace makes no difference of sexes; rather, the weaker carries away the more honour, because it hath had less helps.

It is easy to observe that the New Testament affordeth more store of good women than the Old. Elizabeth led the ring of this mercy, whose barrenness ended in a miraculous fruit both of her body and of her time.

This religious pair made no less progress in virtue than in

age, and yet their virtue could not make their best age fruitful; *Elizabeth was barren.* A just soul and a barren womb may well agree together. Amongst the Jews, barrenness was not a defect only, but a reproach: yet while this good woman was fruitful of holy obedience, she was barren of children. As John, which was miraculously conceived by man, was a fit forerunner of him that was conceived by the Holy Ghost; so a barren matron was meet to make way for a virgin.

None but a son of Aaron might offer incense to God in the temple; and not every son of Aaron; and not any one at all seasons. God is a God of order, and hates confusion no less than irreligion. Albeit he hath not so straitened himself under the Gospel as to tie his service to persons or places, yet his choice is now no less curious because it is more large. He allows none but the authorized, he authorizeth none but the worthy.

The incense doth ever smell of the hand that offers it. I doubt not but that perfume was sweeter which ascended up from the hand of a just Zachary. *The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to God.*

There were courses of ministration in the legal services. God never purposed to burden any of his creatures with devotion. How vain is the ambition of any soul that would load itself with the universal charge of all men! How thankless is their labour that do wilfully overspend themselves in their ordinary vocations!

As Zachary had a course in God's house, so he carefully observed it. The favour of these respites doubled his diligence. The more high and sacred our calling is, the more dangerous is neglect. It is our honour that we may be allowed to wait upon the God of heaven in these immediate services. Woe be to us if we slacken those duties wherein God honours us more than we can honour him!

Many sons of Aaron, yea, of the same family, served at once in the temple, according to the variety of employments. To avoid all difference, they agreed by lot to assign themselves to the several offices of each day. The lot of this day called Zachary to offer incense in the outer temple. I do not find any prescription they had from God of this particular manner of designment. Matters of good order in holy affairs may be ruled by the wise institution of men, according to reason and expediency.

It fell out well that Zachary was chosen by lot to this ministration; that God's immediate hand might be seen in all the pas-

sages that concerned his great prophet; that as the person, so the occasion might be of God's own choosing. In lots, and their seeming casual disposition, God can give a reason, though we can give none.

Morning and evening, twice a day, their Law called them to offer incense to God, that both parts of the day might be consecrate to the Maker of time. The outer temple was the figure of the whole Church upon earth; like as the Holy of Holies represented heaven. Nothing can better resemble our faithful prayers than sweet perfume. These God looks that we should (all his Church over) send up unto him morning and evening. The elevations of our hearts should be perpetual; but if twice in the day we do not present God with our solemn invocations, we make the Gospel less officious than the Law.

That the resemblance of prayers and incense might be apparent, while the priest sends up his incense within the temple the people must send up their prayers without. Their breath and that incense, though remote in the first rising, met ere they went up to heaven.

The people might no more go into the Holy Place, to offer up the incense of prayers unto God, than Zachary might go into the Holy of Holies. While the partition wall stood betwixt Jews and Gentiles, there were also partitions betwixt the Jews and themselves. Now every man is a priest unto God; every man, since the veil was rent, prays within the temple. What are we the better for our greater freedom of access to God under the Gospel, if we do not make use of our privilege?

While they were praying to God, he sees an angel of God. As Gideon's angel went up in the smoke of the sacrifice, so did Zachary's angel, as it were, come down in the fragrant smoke of his incense.

It was ever great news to see an angel of God; but now more, because God had long withdrawn from them all the means of his supernatural revelations. As this wicked people were strangers to their God in their conversation, so was God grown a stranger to them in his apparitions; yet now that the season of the Gospel approached, he visited them with his angels before he visited them by his Son. He sends his angel to men in the form of man, before he sends his Son to take human form.

The presence of angels is no novelty, but their apparition. They are always with us, but rarely seen; that we may awfully respect their messages when they are seen. In the mean time, our faith

may see them, though our senses do not. Their assumed shapes do not make them more present, but visible.

There is an order in that heavenly hierarchy, though we know it not. This angel that appeared to Zachary was not with him in the ordinary course of his attendances, but was purposely sent from God with this message.

Why was an angel sent? and why this angel? It had been easy for him to have raised up the prophetical spirit of some Simeon to this prediction. The same Holy Ghost which revealed to that just man, that he should not see death ere he had seen the Messiah, might have as easily revealed unto him the birth of the forerunner of Christ, and by him to Zachary; but God would have this voice, which should go before his Son, come with a noise. He would have it appear to the world, that the harbinger of the Messiah should be conceived by the marvellous power of that God whose coming he proclaimed. It was fit the first Herald of the Gospel should begin in wonder.

The same angel that came to the blessed Virgin with the news of Christ's conception came to Zachary with the news of John's; for the honour of him that was the greatest of them which were born of women, and for his better resemblance to him which was the Seed of the woman. Both had the Gospel for their errand: one as the messenger of it, the other as the author; both are foretold by the same mouth.

When could it be more fit for the angel to appear unto Zachary than when prayers and incense were offered by him? where could he more fitly appear than in the temple? in what part of the temple more fitly than at the altar of incense? and whereabout, rather than on the right side of the altar? Those glorious spirits, as they are always with us, so most in our devotions; and as in all places, so most of all in God's house. They rejoice to be with us while we are with God; as, contrarily, they turn their faces from us when we go about our sins.

He that had wont to live and serve in the presence of the master was now astonished at the presence of the servant. So much difference there is betwixt our faith and our senses, that the apprehension of the presence of the God of spirits by faith goes down sweetly with us, whereas the sensible apprehension of an angel dismays us. Holy Zachary, that had wont to live by faith, thought he should die when his sense began to be set on work. It was the weakness of him that served at the altar with-

out horror, to be daunted with the face of his fellow-servant. In vain do we look for such ministers of God as are without infirmities, when just Zachary was troubled in his devotions with that wherewith he should have been comforted.

It was partly the suddenness and partly the glory of the apparition that affrighted him.

The good angel was both apprehensive and compassionate of Zachary's weakness; and presently encourages him with a cheerful excitation, *Fear not, Zacharias.* The blessed spirits, though they do not often vocally express it, do pity our human frailties, and secretly suggest comfort unto us when we perceive it not.

Good and evil angels, as they are contrary in estate, so also in disposition The good desire to take away fear, the evil to bring it. It is a fruit of that deadly enmity which is betwixt Satan and us, that he would, if he might, kill us with terror; whereas the good spirits, affecting our relief and happiness, take no pleasure in terrifying us, but labour altogether for our tranquillity and cheerfulness.

There was not more fear in the face than comfort in the speech; *Thy prayer is heard.* No angel could have told him better news. Our desires are uttered in our prayers. What can we wish but to have what we would?

Many good suits had Zachary made, and, amongst the rest, for a son. Doubtless, it was now some space of years since he made that request; for he was now stricken in age, and had ceased to hope; yet had God laid it up all the while; and, when he thinks not of it, brings it forth to effect. Thus doth the mercy of our God deal with his patient and faithful suppliants. In the fervour of their expectation he many times holds them off; and when they least think of it, and have forgotten their own suits, he graciously condescends. Delay of effect may not discourage our faith. It may be God hath long granted ere we shall know of his grant.

Many a father repents him of his fruitfulness, and hath such sons as he wishes unborn; but to have so gracious and happy a son as the angel foretold could not be less comfort than honour to the age of Zachary. The proof of children makes them either the blessings or crosses of their parents. To hear what his son should be before he was, to hear that he should have such a son, a son whose birth should concern the joy of many, a son that should be great in the sight of the Lord, a son that should

be sacred to God, filled with God, beneficial to man, an harbinger to him that was God and man, was news enough to prevent the angel, and to take away that tongue with amazement, which was after lost with incredulity.

The speech was so good that it found not a sudden belief. This good news surprised Zachary. If the intelligence had taken leisure, that his thoughts might have had time to debate the matter, he had easily apprehended the infinite power of him that had promised; the pattern of Abraham and Sarah; and would soon have concluded the appearance of the angel more miraculous than his prediction; whereas now, like a man masked with the strangeness of that he saw and heard, he misdoubts the message, and asks, *How shall I know?* Nature was on his side; and alleged the impossibility of the event, both from age and barrenness. Supernatural tidings, at the first hearing, astonish the heart; and are entertained with doubts by those which upon further acquaintance give them the best welcome.

The weak apprehensions of our imperfect faith are not so much to be censured as pitied.

It is a sure way for the heart, to be prevented with the assurance of the omnipotent power of God, to whom nothing is impossible; so shall the hardest point of faith go down easily with us. If the eye of our mind look upward, it shall meet with nothing to avert or interrupt it; but if right forward, or downward, or round about, every thing is a block in our way.

There is a difference betwixt desire of assurance and unbelief. We cannot be too careful to raise up ourselves arguments to settle our faith; although it should be no faith, if it had no feet to stand upon, but discursive. In matters of faith, if reasons may be brought for the conviction of the gainsayers, it is well; if they be helps, they cannot be grounds of our belief.

In the most faithful heart there are some sparks of infidelity. So to believe that we should have no doubt at all is scarce incident unto flesh and blood. It is a great perfection if we have attained to overcome our doubts.

What did mislead Zachary but that which uses to guide others? reason. *I am old, and my wife is of great age:* as if years and dry loins could be any let to him which is able of very stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Faith and reason have their limits: where reason ends, faith begins; and if reason will be encroaching upon the bounds of

faith, she is straight taken captive by infidelity. We are not fit to follow Christ if we have not denied ourselves, and the chief piece of ourselves is our reason. We must yield God able to do that which we cannot comprehend, and we must comprehend that by our faith which is disclaimed by reason. Hagar must be driven out of doors that Sarah may rule alone.

The authority of the reporter makes way for belief in things which are otherwise hard to pass; although in the matters of God we should not so much care who speaks, as what is spoken, and from whom. The angel tells his name, place, office, unasked; that Zachary might not think any news impossible that was brought him by an heavenly messenger.

Even where there is no use of language, the spirits are distinguished by names, and each knows his own appellation and others'. He that gave leave unto man, his image, to give names unto all his visible and inferior creatures, did himself put names unto the spiritual; and as their name is, so are they mighty and glorious.

But lest Zachary should no less doubt of the style of the messenger than of the errand itself, he is at once both confirmed and punished with dumbness. That tongue which moved the doubt must be tied up. He shall ask no more questions for forty weeks, because he asked this one distrustfully.

Neither did Zachary lose his tongue for the time, but his ears also. He was not only mute, but deaf; for otherwise, when they came to ask his allowance for the name of his son, they needed not to have demanded it by signs but by words. God will not pass over slight offences, and those which may plead the most colourable pretences, in his best children, without a sensible check. It is not our holy entireness with God that can bear us out in the least sin; yea rather, the more acquaintance we have with his majesty, the more sure we are of correction when we offend. This may procure us more favour in our well-doing, not less justice in evil.

Zachary stayed, and the people waited. Whether some longer discourse betwixt the angel and him than needed to be recorded, or whether astonishment at the apparition and news withheld him, I inquire not. The multitude thought him long; yet, though they could but see afar off, they would not depart till he returned to bless them. Their patient attendance without shames us that are hardly persuaded to attend within, while both our senses are

employed in our divine services, and we are admitted to be co-agents with our ministers.

At last Zachary comes out speechless, and more amazes them with his presence than with his delay. The eyes of the multitude that were not worthy to see his vision, yet see the signs of his vision, that the world might be put into the expectation of some extraordinary sequel. God makes way for his voice by silence. His speech could not have said so much as his dumbness.

Zachary would fain have spoken, and could not; with us too many are dumb, and need not. Negligence, fear, partiality, stop the mouths of many which shall once say, "Woe to me, because I held my peace!"

His hand speaks that which he cannot with his tongue; and he makes them by signs to understand that which they might read in his face. Those powers we have, we must use.

But though he have ceased to speak, yet he ceased not to minister. He takes not this dumbness for a dismission, but stays out the eight days of his course; as one that knew the eyes and hands and heart would be accepted of that God which had bereaved him of his tongue. We may not straight take occasions of withdrawing ourselves from the public services of our God, much less under the Gospel. The Law, which stood much upon bodily perfection, dispensed with age for attendance. The Gospel, which is all for the soul, regards those inward powers which, while they are vigorous, exclude all excuses of our ministration.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST.—Luke i.

The Spirit of God was never so accurate in any description as that which concerns the Incarnation of God. It was fit no circumstance should be omitted in that story whereon the faith and salvation of all the world dependeth. We cannot so much as doubt of this truth and be saved. No, not the number of the month, not the name of the angel, is concealed. Every particle imports not more certainty than excellence.

The time is the sixth month after John's conception, the prime of the spring. Christ was conceived in the spring, born in the solstice. He in whom the world received a new life receives life in the same season wherein the world received his first life from him; and he which stretches out the days of his Church,

and lengthens them to eternity, appears after all the short and dim light of the Law, and enlightens the world with his glory.

The messenger is an angel: a man was too mean to carry the news of the conception of God. Never any business was conceived in heaven that did so much concern the earth as the Conception of the God of heaven in womb of Earth. No less than an archangel was worthy to bear this tidings, and never any angel received a greater honour than of this embassage.

It was fit our reparation should answer our fall. An evil angel was the first motioner of the one to Eve, a virgin then espoused to Adam, in the garden of Eden; a good angel is the first reporter of the other to Mary, a virgin espoused to Joseph, in that place which, as the garden of Galilee, had a name from flourishing[a].

No good angel could be the author of our restoration, as that evil angel was of our ruin. But that which those glorious spirits could not do themselves, they are glad to report as done by the God of spirits. Good news rejoices the bearer. With what joy did this holy angel bring the news of that Saviour in whom we are redeemed to life, himself established in life and glory!

The first preacher of the Gospel was an angel. That office must needs be glorious that derives itself from such a predecessor. God appointed his angel to be the first preacher, and hath since called his preachers angels.

The message is well suited. An angel comes to a virgin; Gabriel to Mary; he that was by signification the Strength of God, to her that was by signification exalted by God to the conceiving of him that was the God of Strength: to a maid, but espoused; a maid, for the honour of virginity; espoused, for the honour of marriage. The marriage was in a sort made, not consummate; through the instinct of Him that meant to make her not an example, but a miracle of women.

In this whole work God would have nothing ordinary. It was fit that she should be a married virgin which should be a virgin-mother. He that meant to take man's nature without man's corruption would be the Son of man without man's seed; would be the Seed of the woman without man; and amongst all women of a pure virgin; but amongst virgins of one espoused, that there might be at once a witness and a guardian of her fruitful virginity. If the same God had not been the author of virginity and marriage, he had never countenanced virginity by marriage.

[a] [Nazareth, from נֵצֶר, *a branch.*]

Whither doth this glorious angel come to find the mother of him that was God, but to obscure Galilee? a part which even the Jews themselves despised, as forsaken of their privileges; *Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.* Behold an angel comes to that Galilee out of which no prophet comes, and the God of prophets and angels descends to be conceived in that Galilee out of which no prophet ariseth. He that filleth all places makes no difference of places. It is the person which gives honour and privilege to the place, not the place to the person: as the presence of God makes the heaven, the heaven doth not make the honour glorious. No blind corner of Nazareth can hide the blessed Virgin from the angel. The favours of God will find out his children wheresoever they are withdrawn.

It is the fashion of God to seek out the most despised on whom to bestow his honours. We cannot run away, as from the judgments, so not from the mercies of our God. The cottages of Galilee are preferred by God to the famous palaces of Jerusalem. He cares not how homely he converse with his own. Why should we be transported with the outward glory of places while our God regards it not? We are not of the angel's diet, if we had not rather be with the blessed Virgin at Nazareth than with the proud dames in the court of Jerusalem. It is a great vanity to respect any thing above goodness, and to disesteem goodness for any want.

The angel salutes the Virgin; he prays not to her. He salutes her as a saint; he prays not to her as a goddess. For us to salute her as he did were gross presumption; for neither are we as he was, neither is she as she was. If he that was a spirit saluted her that was flesh and blood here on earth, it is not for us, that are flesh and blood, to salute her which is a glorious spirit in heaven. For us to pray to her in the angel's salutation were to abuse the virgin, the angel, the salutation.

But how gladly do we second the angel in the praise of her which was more ours than his! how justly do we bless her whom the angel pronounceth blessed! how worthily is she honoured of men whom the angel proclaimeth beloved of God! O blessed Mary, he cannot bless thee, he cannot honour thee too much that deifies thee not. That which the angel said of thee thou hast prophesied of thyself: we believe the angel, and thee. All generations shall call thee blessed, by the fruit of whose womb all generations are blessed.

If Zachary were amazed with the sight of this angel, much more the virgin. That very sex had more disadvantage of fear. If it had been but a man that had come to her in that secrecy and suddenness, she could not but have been troubled; how much more, when the shining glory of the person doubled the astonishment!

The troubles of holy minds end ever in comfort. Joy was the errand of the angel, and not terror. Fear (as all passions) disquiets the heart, and makes it for the time unfit to receive the messages of God. Soon hath the angel cleared these troublesome mists of passions, and sent out the beams of heavenly consolation in the remotest corner of her soul by the glad news of her Saviour. How can joy but enter into her heart out of whose womb shall come salvation? What room can fear find in that breast that is assured of favour? "*Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God.* Let those fear who know they are in displeasure, or know not they are gracious. Thy happy estate calls for confidence, and that confidence for joy. What should, what can they fear, who are favoured of him at whom the devils tremble?"

Not the presence of the good angels, but the temptations of evil, strike many terrors into our weakness. We could not be dismayed with them if we did not forget our condition. *We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* If that Spirit, O God, witness with our spirits that we are thine, how can we fear any of those spiritual wickednesses? Give us assurance of thy favour, and let the powers of hell do their worst.

It was no ordinary favour that the Virgin found in heaven. No mortal creature was ever thus graced that He should take part of her nature that was the God of nature; that He which made all things should make his human body of hers; that her womb should yield that flesh which was personally united to the Godhead; that she should bear Him that upholds the world: *Lo, thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.*

It is a question whether there be more wonder in the conception or in the fruit; the conception of the Virgin, or Jesus conceived. Both are marvellous; but the former doth not more exceed all other wonders than the latter exceedeth it; for the child of a virgin is the reimprovement of that power which created the world; but that God should be incarnate of a virgin was an

abasement of his majesty and an exaltation of the creature beyond all example.

Well was that child worthy to make the mother blessed. Here was a double conception; one in the womb of her body, the other of the soul. If that were more miraculous, this was more beneficial; that was her privilege, this was her happiness; if that were singular to her, this is common to all his chosen. There is no renewed heart wherein thou, O Saviour, art not formed again. Blessed be thou that hast herein made us blessed. For what womb can conceive thee and not partake of thee? who can partake of thee, and not be happy?

Doubtless, the Virgin understood the angel, as he meant, of a present conception, which made her so much more inquisitive into the manner and means of this event: *How shall this be, since I know not a man?* That she should conceive a son by the knowledge of man after her marriage consummate could have been no wonder; but how then should that son of hers be the Son of God? This demand was higher. How her present virginity should be instantly fruitful might be well worthy of admiration, of inquiry. Here was desire of information, not doubts of infidelity; yea rather, this question argues faith: it takes for granted that which an unbelieving heart would have stuck at. She says not, "Who and whence art thou? what kingdom is this? where and when shall it be erected?" but, smoothly supposing all those strange things would be done, she insists only on that which did necessarily require a further intimation, and doth not distrust, but demand. Neither doth she say, "This cannot be;" nor "How can this be?" but, *How shall this be?* So doth the angel answer as one that knew he needed not to satisfy curiosity, but to inform judgment and uphold faith. He doth not therefore tell her of the manner, but of the Author of this act: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.* It is enough to know who is the undertaker, and what he will do.

O God, what do we seek a clear light where thou wilt have a shadow? No mother knows the manner of her natural conception; what presumption shall it be for flesh and blood to search how the Son of God took flesh and blood of his creature! It is for none but the Almighty to know those works which he doth immediately concerning himself; those that concern us he hath revealed: secrets to God; things revealed to us.

The answer was not so full but that a thousand difficulties might arise out of the particularities of so strange a message; yet after the angel's solution we hear of no more objections, no more interrogations. The faithful heart when it once understands the good pleasure of God argues no more, but sweetly rests itself in a quiet expectation: *Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.* There is not a more noble proof of our faith than to captivate all the powers of our understanding and will to our Creator, and without all sciscitations to go blindfold whither he will lead us. All disputations with God after his will known, arise from infidelity. *Great is the mystery of godliness;* and if we will give nature leave to cavil, we cannot be Christians. O God, thou art faithful, thou art powerful. It is enough that thou hast said it. In the humility of our obedience we resign ourselves over to thee. Behold the servants of the Lord; be it unto us according to thy word.

How fit was her womb to conceive the flesh of the Son of God by the power of the Spirit of God, whose breast had so soon by the power of the same Spirit conceived an assent to the will of God! And now of an handmaid of God she is advanced to the mother of God. No sooner hath she said, *Be it done,* than it is done: the Holy Ghost overshadows her, and forms her Saviour in her own body.

This very angel that talks with the blessed Virgin could scarce have been able to express the joy of her heart in the sense of this Divine burden. Never any mortal creature had so much cause of exultation. How could she that was full of God be other than full of joy in that God?

Grief grows greater by concealing; joy, by expression. The Holy Virgin had understood by the angel how her cousin Elizabeth was no less of kin to her in condition, the fruitfulness of whose age did somewhat suit the fruitfulness of her virginity. Happiness communicated doubles itself. Here is no straining of courtesy. The blessed Maid, whom vigour of age had more fitted for the way, hastens her journey into the hill country, to visit that gracious matron whom God had made a sign of her miraculous conception. Only the meeting of saints in heaven can parallel the meeting of these two cousins: the two wonders of the world are met under one roof, and congratulate their mutual happiness. When we have Christ spiritually conceived in us, we cannot be quiet till we have imparted our joy.

Elizabeth, that holy matron, did no sooner welcome her blessed cousin than her babe welcomes his Saviour. Both, in the retired closets of their mother's womb, are sensible of each other's presence; the one by his omniscience, the other by instinct. He did not more forerun Christ than overrun nature. How should our hearts leap within us when the Son of God vouchsafes to come into the secret of our souls; not to visit us, but to dwell with us, to dwell in us!

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.—Luke ii.

As all the actions of men, so especially the public actions of public men, are ordered by God to other ends than their own. This edict went not so much out from Augustus as from the court of heaven. What, did Cæsar know Joseph and Mary? His charge was universal, to a world of subjects through all the Roman empire. God intended this cension only for the blessed Virgin and her Son, that Christ might be born where he should. Cæsar meant to fill his coffers: God meant to fulfil his prophecies; and so to fulfil them, that those whom it concerned might not feel the accomplishment. If God had directly commanded the Virgin to go up to Bethlehem, she had seen the intention and expected the issue; but that wise Moderator of all things, that works his will in us, loves so to do it as may be least with our foresight and acquaintance, and would have us fall under his decrees unawares, that we may so much the more adore the depths of his providence. Every creature walks blindfold; only he that dwells in light sees whither they go.

Doubtless, blessed Mary meant to have been delivered of her divine burden at home, and little thought of changing the place of conception for another of her birth. That house was honoured by the angel, yea, by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. None could equally satisfy her hopes or desires. It was fit that he which made choice of the womb wherein his Son should be conceived should make choice of the place where his Son should be born. As the work is all his, so will he alone contrive all the circumstances to his own ends.

O the infinite wisdom of God in casting all his designs! There needs no other proof of Christ than Cæsar and Bethlehem; and of Cæsars, than Augustus. His government, his edict, pleads the

truth of the Messias. His government: now was the deep peace of all the world under that quiet sceptre which made way for him who was the Prince of Peace; if wars be a sign of the time of his second coming, peace was a sign of his first. His edict: now was the sceptre departed from Judah; it was the time for Shiloh to come. No power was left in the Jews but to obey. Augustus is the emperor of the world; under him, Herod is the king of Judea, Cyrenius is president of Syria. Jewry hath nothing of her own. For Herod, if he were a king, yet he was no Jew; and if he had been a Jew, yet he was no otherwise a king than tributary and titular. The edict came out from Augustus, was executed by Cyrenius. Herod is no actor in this service. Gain and glory are the ends of this taxation. Each man professed himself a subject, and paid for the privilege of his servitude. Now their very heads were not their own, but must be paid for to the head of a foreign state. They which before stood upon the terms of their immunity stoop at the last. The proud suggestions of Judas the Galilean might shed their blood and swell their stomachs, but could not ease their yoke; neither was it the meaning of God, that holiness, if they had been as they pretended, should shelter them from subjection.

A tribute is imposed upon God's free people. This act of bondage brings them liberty. Now, when they seemed most neglected of God, they are blessed with a Redeemer; when they are most pressed with foreign sovereignty, God sends them a King of their own, to whom Cæsar himself must be a subject. The goodness of our God picks out the most needful times of our relief and comfort. Our extremities give him the most glory.

Whither must Joseph and Mary come to be taxed but unto Bethlehem, David's city? The very place proves their descent. He that succeeded David in his throne must succeed him in the place of his birth. So clearly was Bethlehem designed to this honour by the prophets, that even the priests and scribes could point Herod unto it, and assured him the King of the Jews could be no where else born. Bethlehem, justly *the house of bread*; the bread that came down from heaven is there given to the world: whence should we have the Bread of Life but from the house of bread? O holy David, was this the well of Bethlehem whereof thou didst so thirst to drink of old when thou saidst, *O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!* Surely that other water, when it was brought thee by

thy worthies, thou pouredst it on the ground, and wouldst not drink of it. This was that living water for which thy soul longed, whereof thou saidst elsewhere, *As the hart brayeth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God: my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.*

It was no less than four days' journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. How just an excuse might the blessed Virgin have pleaded for her absence! What woman did ever undertake such a journey so near her delivery? And doubtless Joseph, which was now taught of God to love and honour her, was loath to draw forth a dear wife in so unwieldy a case into so manifest hazard. But the charge was peremptory, the obedience exemplary. The desire of an inoffensive observance even of heathenish authority digests all difficulties. We may not take easy occasions to withdraw our obedience to supreme commands; yea, how didst thou, O Saviour, by whom Augustus reigned, in the womb of thy mother yield this homage to Augustus! The first lesson that ever thy example taught us was obedience.

After many steps are Joseph and Mary come to Bethlehem. The plight wherein she was would not allow any speed, and the forced leisure of the journey causeth disappointment. The end was worse than the way; there was no rest in the way; there was no room in the inn. It could not be but that there were many of the kindred of Joseph and Mary at that time in Bethlehem, for both there were their ancestors born, if not themselves, and thither came up all the cousins of their blood; yet there and then doth the holy Virgin want room to lay either her head or her burden. If the house of David had not lost all mercy and good-nature, a daughter of David could not so near the time of her travail have been destitute of lodging in the city of David.

Little did the Bethlehemites think what a guest they refused, else they would gladly have opened their doors to him which was able to open the gates of heaven to them. Now their inhospitality is punishment enough to itself: they have lost the honour and happiness of being host to their God.

Even still, O blessed Saviour, thou standest at our doors and knockest. Every motion of thy good Spirit tells us thou art there. Now thou comest in thine own name, and there thou standest, while thy head is full of dew and thy locks wet with the drops of the night. If we suffer carnal desires and worldly thoughts to take up the lodging of our heart and revel within us

while thou waitest upon our admission, surely our judgment shall be so much the greater by how much better we know whom we have excluded. What, do we cry shame on the Bethlehemites, whilst we are wilfully more churlish, more unthankful?

There is no room in my heart for the wonder at this humility. He for whom heaven is too strait, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, lies in the strait cabin of the womb, and when he would enlarge himself for the world is not allowed the room of an inn. The many mansions of heaven were at his disposing; the earth was his, and the fulness of it; yet he suffers himself to be refused of a base cottage, and complaineth not. What measure should discontent us wretched men, when thou, O God, farest thus from thy creatures? How should we learn both to want and abound from thee, which, abounding with the glory and riches of heaven, wouldst want a lodging in thy first welcome to the earth! Thou camest to thine own, and thy own received thee not; how can it trouble us to be rejected of the world, which is not ours? What wonder is it if thy servants wandered abroad in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute and afflicted, when their Lord is denied harbour?

How should all the world blush at this indignity of Bethlehem! He that came to save men is sent for his first lodging to the beasts; the stable is become his inn, the cratch his bed. O strange cradle of that Great King which heaven itself may envy! O Saviour, thou that wert both the Maker and Owner of heaven, of earth, couldst have made thee a palace without hands, couldst have commanded thee an empty room in those houses which thy creatures had made. When thou didst but bid the angels avoid their first place, they fell down from heaven like lightning; and when in thy humbled estate thou didst but say, *I am he*, who was able to stand before thee? how easy had it been for thee to have made place for thyself in the throngs of the stateliest courts! Why wouldst thou be thus homely, but that by contemning worldly glories thou mightest teach us to contemn them? that thou mightest sanctify poverty to them whom thou calledst unto want? that since thou, which hadst the choice of all earthly conditions, wouldst be born poor and despised, those which must want out of necessity might not think their poverty grievous?

Here was neither friend to entertain, nor servant to attend, nor place wherein to be attended; only the poor beasts gave way to

the God of all the world. It is the great mystery of godliness that *God was manifested in the flesh,* and *seen of angels;* but here, which was the top of all wonders, the very beasts might see their Maker. For those spirits to see God in the flesh, it was not so strange as for the brute creatures to see him which was the God of spirits. He that would be led into the wilderness amongst wild beasts to be tempted, would come into the house of beasts to be born, that from the height of his divine glory his humiliation might be the greater. How can we be abased low enough for thee, O Saviour, that hast thus neglected thyself for us?

That the visitation might be answerable to the homeliness of the place, attendants, provision, who shall come to congratulate his birth but poor shepherds? The kings of the earth rest at home, and have no summons to attend him by whom they reign. God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. In an obscure time (the night), unto obscure men (shepherds), doth God manifest the light of his Son by glorious angels. It is not our meanness, O God, that can exclude us from the best of thy mercies; yea, thus far dost thou respect persons, that thou hast put down the mighty, and exalted them of low degree.

If these shepherds had been snorting in their beds, they had no more seen angels, nor heard news of their Saviour, than their neighbours: their vigilancy is honoured with this heavenly vision. Those which are industrious in any calling are capable of further blessings, whereas the idle are fit for nothing but temptation.

No less than a whole choir of angels are worthy to sing the hymn of *Glory to God* for the incarnation of his Son: what joy is enough for us, whose nature he took, and whom he came to restore by his incarnation? If we had the tongues of angels we could not raise this note high enough to the praise of our glorious Redeemer.

No sooner do the shepherds hear the news of a Saviour than they run to Bethlehem to seek him. Those that left their beds to tend their flocks leave their flocks to inquire after their Saviour. No earthly thing is too dear to be forsaken for Christ. If we suffer any worldly occasion to stay us from Bethlehem, we care more for our sheep than our souls. It is not possible that a faithful heart should hear where Christ is, and not labour to the sight, to the fruition of him. Where art thou, O Saviour,

but at home in thine own house, in the assembly of thy saints? where art thou to be found but in thy word and sacraments? yea, there thou seekest for us: if there we haste not to seek for thee, we are worthy to want thee; worthy that our want of thee here should make us want the presence of thy face for ever.

THE SAGES AND THE STAR.—Matthew ii.

The shepherds and the cratch accorded well; yet even they saw nothing which they might not contemn: neither was there any of those shepherds that seemed not more like a king than that King whom they came to see.

But O the Divine Majesty that shined in this baseness! There lies the Babe in the stable, crying in the manger, whom the angels came down from heaven to proclaim, whom the Sages come from the East to adore, whom a heavenly Star notifies to the world, that now men might see that heaven and earth serves him that neglected himself.

Those lights that hang low are not far seen, but those which are high placed are equally seen in the remotest distances. Thy light, O Saviour, was no less than heavenly. The East saw that which Bethlehem might have seen. Ofttimes, those which are nearest in place are farthest off in affection. Large objects, when they are too close to the eye, do so overfill the sense that they are not discerned.

What a shame is this to Bethlehem! The Sages came out of the East to worship him whom that village refused.

The Bethlehemites were Jews; the Wise Men, Gentiles. This first entertainment of Christ was a presage of the sequel. The Gentiles shall come from far to adore Christ, while the Jews reject him.

Those Easterlings were great searchers of the depths of nature; professed philosophers. Them hath God singled out to the honour of the manifestation of Christ. Human learning well improved makes us capable of divine. There is no knowledge whereof God is not the author. He would never have bestowed any gift that should lead us away from himself. It is an ignorant conceit that inquiry into nature should make men atheous. No man is so apt to see the Star of Christ as a diligent disciple of philosophy.

Doubtless this light was visible unto more; only they followed

it which knew it had more than nature. He is truly wise that is wise for his own soul. If these Wise Men had been acquainted with all the other stars of heaven, and had not seen the Star of Christ, they had had but light enough to lead them into utter darkness. Philosophy without this Star is but the wisp of error.

These Sages were in a mean between the angels and the shepherds. God would in all the ranks of intelligent creatures have some to be witnesses of his Son.

The Angels direct the Shepherds; the Star guides the Sages: the duller capacity hath the more clear and powerful helps. The wisdom of our good God proportions the means unto the disposition of the persons.

Their astronomy had taught them this star was not ordinary, whether in sight or in brightness or in motion. The eyes of nature might well see that some strange news was portended to the world by it; but that this Star designed the birth of the Messiah there needed yet another light. If the Star had not besides had the commentary of a revelation from God, it could have led the Wise Men only into a fruitless wonder. Give them to be the offspring of Balaam, yet the true prediction of that false prophet was not enough warrant. If he told them the Messias should arise as a Star out of Jacob, he did not tell them that a Star should arise far from the posterity of Jacob at the birth of the Messiàs. He that did put that prophecy into the mouth of Balaam did also put this illumination into the heart of the Sages. The Spirit of God is free to breathe where he listeth: *many shall come from the east and the west* to seek Christ, when *the children of the kingdom shall be shut out.* Even then God did not so confine his election to the pale of the Church, as that he did not sometimes look out for special instruments of his glory.

Whither do these Sages come but to Jerusalem? Where should they hope to hear of the new King but in the mother city of the kingdom? The conduct of the Star was first only general to Judea: the rest is for a time left to inquiry. They were not brought thither for their own sakes, but for Jewry's, for the world's; that they might help to make the Jews inexcusable, and the world faithful. That their tongues therefore might blazon the birth of Christ, they are brought to the head city of Judea to report and inquire.

Their wisdom could not teach them to imagine that a King could be born to Judea of that note and magnificence, that a Star

from heaven should publish him to the earth, and that his subjects should not know it; and therefore, as presupposing a common notice, they say, *Where is he that is born King of the Jews?* There is much deceit in probabilities, especially when we meddle with spiritual matters; for God uses still to go a way by himself.

If we judge according to reason and appearance, who are so likely to understand heavenly truths as the profound doctors of the world? These God passes over, and reveals his will to babes. Had these Sages met with the shepherds of the villages near Bethlehem, they had received that intelligence of Christ which they did vainly seek from the learned scribes of Jerusalem. The greatest clerks are not always the wisest in the affairs of God. These things go not by discourse, but by revelation.

No sooner hath the Star brought them within the noise of Jerusalem than it is vanished out of sight. God would have their eyes lead them so far as till their tongues might be set on work to win the vocal attestation of the chief priests and scribes to the foreappointed place of our Saviour's nativity. If the Star had carried them directly to Bethlehem, the learned Jews had never searched the truth of those prophecies wherewith they are since justly convinced. God never withdraws our helps but for a further advantage. However our hopes seem crossed, where his Name may gain, we cannot complain of loss.

Little did the Sages think this question would have troubled Herod. They had, I fear, concealed their message, if they had suspected this event. Sure they thought it might be some son or grandchild of him which then held the throne; so as this might win favour from Herod rather than an unwelcome fear of rivality. Doubtless they went first to the court; where else should they ask for a king?

The more pleasing this news had been if it had fallen upon Herod's own loins, the more grievous it was to light upon a stranger. If Herod had not overmuch affected greatness, he had not upon those indirect terms aspired to the crown of Jewry: so much the more therefore did it trouble him to hear the rumour of a successor, and that not of his own. Settled greatness cannot abide either change or partnership.

If any of his subjects had moved this question, I fear his head had answered it: it is well that the name of foreigners could excuse these Sages.

Herod could not be brought up among the Jews, and not have heard many and confident reports of a Messias that should ere long arise out of Israel; and now, when he hears the fame of a King born, whom a star from heaven signifies and attends, he is nettled with the news. Every thing affrights the guilty. Usurpation is full of jealousies and fear; no less full of projects and imaginations: it makes us think every bush a man, and every man a thief.

Why art thou troubled, O Herod? A King is born; but such a King as whose sceptre may ever concur with lawful sovereignty; yea such a King as by whom kings do hold their sceptres, not lose them. If the Wise Men tell thee of a King, the Star tells thee he is heavenly. Here is good cause of security, none of fear. The most general enmities and oppositions to good arise from mistakings. If men could but know how much safety and sweetness there is in all divine truth, it could receive nothing from them but welcomes and gratulations. Misconceits have been still guilty of all wrongs and persecutions.

But if Herod were troubled, (as tyranny is still suspicious,) why was all Jerusalem troubled with him? Jerusalem, which now might hope for a relaxation of her bonds, for a recovery of her liberty and right? Jerusalem, which now only had cause to lift up her drooping head in the joy and happiness of a Redeemer? Yet not Herod's court, but even Jerusalem was troubled. So had this miserable city been overtoiled with change, that now they were settled in a condition quietly evil they are troubled with the news of better. They had now got a habit of servility, and now they are so acquainted with the yoke, that the very noise of liberty, which they supposed would not come with ease, began to be unwelcome. To turn the causes of joy into sorrow argues extreme dejectedness, and a distemper of judgment no less than desperate.

Fear puts on a visor of devotion. Herod calls his learned council, and, as not doubting whether the Messiah should be born, he asks where he shall be born. In the disparition of that other light, there is a perpetually fixed Star shining in the writings of the prophets, that guides the chief priests and scribes directly unto Bethlehem. As yet, envy and prejudice had not blinded the eyes and perverted the hearts of the Jewish teachers; so as now they clearly justify that Christ whom they afterwards condemn, and by thus justifying him condemn themselves in re-

jecting him. The water that is untroubled yields the visage perfectly. If God had no more witness but from his enemies, we have ground enough of our faith.

Herod feared, but dissembled his fear; as thinking it a shame that strangers should see there could any power arise under him worthy of his respect or awe. Out of an unwillingness therefore to discover the impotency of his passion, he makes little ado of the matter; but only, after a privy inquisition into the time, employs the informers in the search of the person; *Go and search diligently for the babe,* &c. It was no great journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. How easily might Herod's cruelty have secretly suborned some of his bloody courtiers to this inquiry and execution! If God had not meant to mock him before he found himself mocked of the Wise Men, he had rather sent before their journey than after their disappointment; but that God, in whose hands all hearts are, did purposely besot him, that he might not find the way to so horrible a mischief.

There is no villany so great but it will mask itself under a show of piety. Herod will also worship the Babe. The courtesy of a false tyrant is death. A crafty hypocrite never means so ill as when he speaketh fairest.

The Wise Men are upon their way full of expectation, full of desire. I see no man either of the city or court to accompany them. Whether distrust or fear hindered them, I inquire not; but of so many thousand Jews no one stirs his foot to see that King of theirs which strangers came so far to visit.

Yet were not these resolute Sages discouraged with this solitariness and small respect, nor drawn to repent of their journey, as thinking, "What do we come so far to honour a king whom no man will acknowledge? what mean we to travel so many hundred miles to see that which the inhabitants will not look out to behold?" but cheerfully renew their journey to that place which the ancient light of prophecy had designed.

And now, behold, God encourages their holy forwardness from heaven, by sending them their first guide; as if he had said, "What need ye care for the neglect of men, when ye see heaven honours the King whom ye seek?" What joy these Sages conceived, when their eyes first beheld the reappearance of that happy Star, they only can tell, that, after a long and sad night of temptation, have seen the loving countenance of God shining forth upon their souls. If with obedience and courage we can

follow the calling of God in difficult enterprises, we shall not want supplies of comfort. Let not us be wanting to God, we shall be sure he cannot be wanting to us.

He that led Israel by a pillar of fire into the Land of Promise, leads the Wise Men by a Star to the Promised Seed. All his directions partake of that light which is in him; for *God is light.*

This Star moves both slowly and low, as might be fittest for the pace, for the purpose of these pilgrims. It is the goodness of God that, in those means wherein we cannot reach him, he descends unto us.

Surely when the Wise Men saw the Star stand still, they looked about to see what palace there might be near unto that station fit for the birth of a King; neither could they think that sorry shed was it which the Star meant to point out; but finding their guide settled over that base roof, they go in to see what guest it held. They enter, and, O God, what a King do they find! how poor! how contemptible! wrapt in clouts, laid in straw, cradled in the manger, attended with beasts! What a sight was this after all the glorious promises of that Star, after the predictions of prophets, after the magnificence of their expectation!

All their way afforded nothing so despicable as that Babe whom they came to worship. But, as those which could not have been Wise Men unless they had known that the greatest glories have arisen from mean beginnings, they fall down and worship that hidden Majesty. This baseness hath bred wonder in them, not contempt. They well knew the Star could not lye. They, which saw his Star afar off in the East, when he lay swaddled in Bethlehem, do also see his royalty farther off in the despised estate of his infancy; a royalty more than human. They well knew that stars did not use to attend earthly kings, and if their aim had not been higher, what was a Jewish king to Persian strangers? Answerable therefore hereunto was their adoration.

Neither did they lift up empty hands to him whom they worshipped, but presented him with the most precious commodities of their country, *gold, incense, myrrh;* not as thinking to enrich him with these, but by way of homage acknowledging him the Lord of these. If these Sages had been kings, and had offered a princely weight of gold, the blessed Virgin had not needed in her purification to have offered two young pigeons as the sign of her penury. As God loves not empty hands, so he measures fulness by the affection. Let it be gold or incense or myrrh that we

offer him, it cannot but please him who doth not use to ask how much, but how good.

THE PURIFICATION.—Luke ii.

There could be no impurity in the Son of God, and if the best substance of a pure virgin carried in it any taint of Adam, that was scoured away by sanctification in the womb, and yet the Son would be circumcised and the mother purified. He that came to be sin for us would in our persons be legally unclean; that by satisfying the Law he might take away our uncleanness. Though he were exempted from the common condition of our birth, yet he would not deliver himself from those ordinary rites that implied the weakness and blemishes of humanity. He would fulfil one law to abrogate it, another to satisfy it. He that was above the Law would come under the Law to free us from the Law. Not a day would be changed either in the circumcision of Christ or the purification of Mary.

Here was neither convenience of place nor of necessaries for so painful a work in the stable of Bethlehem, yet he that made and gave the Law will rather keep it with difficulty than transgress it with ease.

Why wouldst thou, O blessed Saviour, suffer that sacred foreskin to be cut off, but that by the power of thy circumcision the same might be done to our souls that was done to thy body? We cannot be therefore thine if our hearts be uncircumcised. Do thou that in us which was done to thee for us, cut off the superfluity of our maliciousness, that we may be holy in and by thee, which for us wert content to be legally impure.

There was shame in thy birth, there was pain in thy circumcision. After a contemptible welcome into the world, that a sharp razor should pass through thy skin for our sakes (which can hardly endure to bleed for our own), it was the praise of thy wonderful mercy in so early humiliation. What pain or contempt should we refuse for thee that hast made no spare of thyself for us?

Now is Bethlehem left with too much honour. There is Christ born, adored, circumcised.

No sooner is the blessed Virgin either able or allowed to walk, than she travels to Jerusalem to perform her holy rites for herself,

for her Son; to purify herself, to present her Son. She goes not to her own house at Nazareth, she goes to God's house at Jerusalem. If purifying were a shadow, yet thanksgiving is a substance. Those whom God hath blessed with fruit of body and safety of deliverance, if they make not their first journey to the temple of God, they partake more of the unthankfulness of Eve than Mary's devotion.

Her forty days therefore were no sooner out than Mary comes up to the holy city. The rumour of a new King born at Bethlehem was yet fresh at Jerusalem since the report of the Wise Men, and what good news had this been for any pickthank to carry to the court! "Here is the Babe whom the star signified, whom the sages inquired for, whom the angels proclaimed, whom the shepherds talked of, whom the scribes and high priests notified, whom Herod seeks after." Yet unto that Jerusalem which was troubled at the report of his birth is Christ come, and all tongues are so locked up, that he which sent from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to seek him finds him not, who, as to countermine Herod, is come from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Dangers that are aloof off, and but possible, may not hinder us from the duty of our devotion. God saw it not yet time to let loose the fury of his adversaries, whom he holds up like some eager mastiffs, and then only lets go when they shall most shame themselves and glorify him.

Well might the blessed Virgin have wrangled with the Law and challenged an immunity from all ceremonies of purification. "What should I need purging which did not conceive in sin? This is for those mothers whose births are unclean; mine is from God, which is purity itself. The Law of Moses reaches only to those women which have conceived seed; I conceived not this seed, but the Holy Ghost in me. The Law extends to the mothers of those sons which are under the Law; mine is above it." But as one that cared more for her peace than her privilege, and more desired to be free from offence than from labour and charge, she dutifully fulfils the law of that God whom she carried in her womb and in her arms; like the mother of Him, who, though he knew the children of the kingdom free, yet would pay tribute unto Cæsar; like the mother of Him whom it behoved to fulfil all righteousness. And if she were so officious in ceremonies as not to admit of any excuse in the very circumstance of her obedience, how much more strict was she in the main duties of morality! That soul is fit for the spiritual conception of Christ that is conscionably scrupulous in

observing all God's commandments, whereas he hates all alliance to a negligent or froward heart.

The law of purification proclaims our uncleanness. The mother is not allowed after her childbirth to come unto the sanctuary or to touch any hallowed thing till her set time be expired. What are we, whose very birth infects the mother that bears us?

At last she comes to the temple; but with sacrifices, either a lamb and a pigeon, or turtle, or, in the meaner estate, two turtle-doves or young pigeons: whereof one is for a burnt offering, the other for a sin offering; the one for thanksgiving, the other for expiation: for expiation of a double sin; of the mother that conceived, of the child that was conceived.

We are all born sinners; and it is a just question, whether we do more infect the world or the world us. They are gross flatterers of Nature that tell her she is clean. If our lives had no sin, we bring enough with us. The very infant that lives not to sin as Adam, yet he sinned in Adam, and is sinful in himself.

But O the unspeakable mercy of our God! we provide the sin, he provides the remedy. Behold an expiation well near as early as our sin; the blood of a young lamb or dove, yea rather the blood of Him whose innocence was represented by both, cleanseth us presently from our filthiness.

First went circumcision; then came the sacrifice; that by two holy acts that which was naturally unholy might be hallowed unto God. Under the Gospel our baptism hath the force of both: it does away our corruption by the water of the Spirit; it applies to us the sacrifice of Christ's blood, whereby we are cleansed. O that we could magnify this goodness of our God which hath not left our very infancy without redress; but hath provided helps whereby we may be delivered from the danger of our hereditary evils.

Such is the favourable respect of our wise God, that he would not have us undo ourselves with devotion. The service he requires of us is ruled by our abilities. Every poor mother was not able to bring a lamb to her offering; there was none so poor but might procure a pair of turtles or pigeons. These doth God both prescribe and accept from poorer hands no less than the beasts of a thousand mountains. He looks for somewhat of every one, not of every one alike. Since it is he that makes differences of abilities, to whom it were as easy to make all rich, his mercy will make no difference in the acceptation. The truth and heartiness of obe-

dience is that which he will crown in his meanest servants. A mite from the poor widow is more worth to him than the talents of the wealthy.

After all the presents of those eastern worshippers, who intended rather homage than ditation, the blessed Virgin comes in the form of poverty, with her two doves, unto God. She could not without some charge lie all this while at Bethlehem; she could not without charge travel from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Her offering confesseth her penury. The best are not ever the wealthiest. Who can despise any one for want when the mother of Christ was not rich enough to bring a lamb for her purification? We may be as happy in russet as in tissue.

While the blessed Virgin brought her Son into the temple with that pair of doves, here were more doves than a pair. They for whose sake that offering was brought were more doves than the doves that were brought for that offering. Her Son, for whom she brought that dove to be sacrificed, was that sacrifice which the dove represented. There was nothing in him but perfection of innocence, and the oblation of him is that whereby all mothers and sons are fully purified. Since in ourselves we cannot be innocent, happy are we if we can have the spotless Dove sacrificed for us, to make us innocent in him.

The blessed Virgin had more business in the temple than her own: she came, as to purify herself, so to present her Son. Every male that first opened the womb was holy unto the Lord. He that was the Son of God by eternal generation before time, and by miraculous conception in time, was also by common course of nature consecrate unto God. It is fit the holy Mother should present God with his own. Her firstborn was the firstborn of all creatures. It was he whose temple it was that he was presented in, to whom all the firstborn of all creatures were consecrated, by whom they were accepted; and now is he brought in his mother's arms to his own house; and as man is presented to himself as God. If Moses had never written law of God's special propriety[a] in the firstborn, this Son of God's Essence and Love had taken possession of the temple. His right had been a perfect law to himself. Now his obedience to that law which himself had given doth no less call him thither than the challenge of his peculiar interest.

He that was the Lord of all creatures ever since he struck the firstborn of the Egyptians requires the first male of all creatures,

[a] [property]

both man and beast, to be dedicated to him: wherein God caused a miraculous event to second nature, which seems to challenge the first and best for the Maker. By this rule, God should have had his service done only by the heirs of Israel. But since God, for the honour and remuneration of Levi, had chosen out that tribe to minister unto him, now the firstborn of all Israel must be presented to God as his due, but by allowance redeemed to their parents. As for beasts, the first male of the clean beasts must be sacrificed; of unclean, exchanged for a price. So much morality is there in this constitution of God, that the best of all kinds is fit to be consecrated to the Lord of all. Every thing we have is too good for us, if we think any thing we have too good for him.

How glorious did the temple now seem that the Owner was within the walls of it! Now was the hour and Guest come, in regard whereof the second temple should surpass the first. This was his house built for him, dedicated to him; there had he dwelt long in his spiritual presence, in his typical. There was nothing either placed or done within those walls whereby he was not resembled; and now the Body of those shadows is come, and presents himself where he had been ever represented. Jerusalem is now every where. There is no Church, no Christian heart which is not a temple of the living God. There is no temple of God wherein Christ is not presented to his Father. Look upon him, O God, in whom thou art well pleased, and in him and for him be well pleased with us.

Under the Gospel we are all firstborn, all heirs; every soul is to be holy unto the Lord; we are a royal generation, an holy priesthood. Our baptism, as it is our circumcision and our sacrifice of purification, so is it also our presentation unto God. Nothing can become us but holiness. O God, to whom we are devoted, serve thyself of us, glorify thyself by us, till we shall by thee be glorified with thee.

HEROD AND THE INFANTS.—Matthew ii.

Well might these Wise Men have suspected Herod's secrecy. If he had meant well, what needed that whispering? That which they published in the streets he asks in his privy chamber; yet they, not misdoubting his intention, purpose to fulfil his charge. It could not, in their apprehension, but be much honour to them

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to make their success known; that now both king and people might see it was not fancy that led them, but an assured revelation.

That God which brought them thither diverted them, and caused their eyes to shut to guide them the best way home.

These sages made a happy voyage; for now they grew into further acquaintance with God. They are honoured with a second messenger from heaven. They saw the star in the way, the angel in their bed: the star guided their journey unto Christ, the angel directed their return. They saw the star by day, a vision by night: God spake to their eyes by the star, he speaks to their heart by a dream.

No doubt they had left much noise of Christ behind them. They that did so publish his birth by their inquiry at Jerusalem could not be silent when they found him at Bethlehem.

If they had returned by Herod, I fear they had come short home. He that meant death to the Babe for the name of a King could mean no other to those that honoured and proclaimed a new King, and erected a throne besides his. They had done what they came for; and now that God whose business they came about takes order at once for his Son's safety and for theirs. God, which is perfection itself, never begins any business but he makes an end, and ends happily. When our ways are his, there is no danger of miscarriage.

Well did these Wise Men know the difference, as of stars, so of dreams: they had learned to distinguish between the natural and divine; and once apprehending God in their sleep, they follow him waking, and return another way.

They were no subjects to Herod; his command pressed them so much the less: or, if the being within his dominions had been no less bond than native subjection, yet where God did countermand Herod, there could be no question whom to obey. They say not, "We are in a strange country, Herod may meet with us; it can be no less than death to mock him in his own territories;" but cheerfully put themselves upon the way, and trust God with the success. Where men command with God we must obey men for God, and God in men; when against him, the best obedience is to deny obedience, and to turn our backs upon Herod.

The Wise Men are safely arrived in the East, and fill the world full of expectation, as themselves are full of wonder.

Joseph and Mary are returned with the Babe to that Jerusalem where the Wise Men had inquired for his birth. The city was doubtless still full of that rumour, and little thinks that he whom they talk of was so near them.

From thence they are at least in their way to Nazareth, where they purpose their abode. God prevents them by his angel, and sends them for safety into Egypt.

Joseph was not wont to be so full of visions. It was not long since the angel appeared unto him, to justify the innocency of the mother and the Deity of the Son: now he appears for the preservation of both, and a preservation by flight.

Could Joseph now choose but think, "Is this the King that must save Israel, that needs to be saved by me? If he be the Son of God, how is he subject to the violence of men? How is he almighty that must save himself by flight? or how must he fly to save himself out of that land which he comes to save?" But faithful Joseph, having been once tutored by the angel, and having heard what the Wise Men said of the star, what Simeon and Anna said in the temple, labours not so much to reconcile his thoughts as to subject them; and, as one that knew it safer to suppress doubts than to assoil them, can believe what he understands not, and can wonder where he cannot comprehend.

O strange condition of the King of all the world! He could not be born in a baser estate; yet even this he cannot enjoy with safety. There was no room for him in Bethlehem; there will be no room for him in Judea. He is no sooner come to his own than he must fly from them; that he may save them, he must avoid them.

Had it not been easy for thee, O Saviour, to have acquit thyself from Herod a thousand ways? What could an arm of flesh have done against the God of spirits! what had it been for thee to have sent Herod five years sooner unto his place! What to have commanded fire from heaven on those that should have come to apprehend thee? or to have bidden the earth to receive them alive whom she meant to swallow dead? We suffer misery because we must; thou, because thou wouldst. The same will that brought thee from heaven into earth sends thee from Jewry to Egypt. As thou wouldst be born mean and miserable, so thou wouldst live subject to human vexations; that thou which hast taught us how good it is to bear the yoke even in our youth, mightst sanctify to us early afflictions.

Or whether, O Father, since it was the purpose of thy wisdom to manifest thy Son by degrees unto the world, was it thy will thus to hide him for a time under our infirmity? And what other is our condition? We are no sooner born thine than we are persecuted. If the Church travail and bring forth a male, she is in danger of the dragon's streams[a]. What do the members complain of the same measure which was offered to the head? Both our births are accompanied with tears.

Even of those whose mature age is full of trouble, yet the infancy is commonly quiet; but here life and toil began together.

O blessed Virgin! even already did the sword begin to pierce thy soul. Thou which wert forced to bear thy Son in thy womb from Nazareth to Bethlehem must now bear him in thy arms from Jewry into Egypt: yet couldst thou not complain of the way whilst thy Saviour was with thee. His presence alone was able to make the stable a temple, Egypt a paradise; the way more pleasing than rest.

But whither then, O whither dost thou carry that blessed burden by which thyself and the world are upholden? To Egypt, the slaughterhouse of God's people, the furnace of Israel's ancient affliction, the sink of the world. *Out of Egypt have I called my Son*, saith God. That thou calledst thy Son out of Egypt, O God, is no marvel; it is a marvel that thou calledst him into Egypt; but that we know all earths are thine, and all places and men are like figures upon a table, such as thy disposition makes them.

What a change is here! Israel, the firstborn of God, flies out of Egypt into the promised land of Judea; Christ, the firstborn of all creatures, flies from Judea into Egypt. Egypt is become the sanctuary, Judea the inquisition-house, of the Son of God. He that is every where the same makes all places alike to his: he makes the fiery furnace a gallery of pleasure; the lions' den an house of defence; the whale's belly a lodging chamber; Egypt an harbour.

He flees that was able to preserve himself from danger; to teach us how lawfully we may flee from those dangers we cannot avoid otherwise. It is a thankless fortitude to offer our throat unto the knife. He that came to die for us fled for his own preservation, and hath bid us follow him; *When they persecute you in one city, flee into another.* We have but the use of our lives, and we are bound to husband them to the best advantage of God

[a] [See Rev. xii. 13—16.]

and his Church. God hath made us, not as butts to be perpetually shot at, but as the marks of rovers, movable, as the wind and sun may best serve.

It was warrant enough for Joseph and Mary that God commands them to flee; yet so familiar is God grown with his approved servants, that he gives them the reason of his commanded flight: *for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.* What wicked men will do, what they would do, is known unto God beforehand. He that is so infinitely wise to know the designs of his enemies before they are, could as easily prevent them, that they might not be; but he lets them run on in their own courses, that he may fetch glory to himself out of their wickedness.

Good Joseph having this charge in the night stays not till the morning; no sooner had God said *Arise,* than he starts up and sets forward. It was not diffidence, but obedience that did so hasten his departure. The charge was direct, the business important. He dares not linger for the light, but breaks his rest for the journey; and taking vantage of the dark, departs towards Egypt. How knew he this occasion would abide any delay? We cannot be too speedy in the execution of God's commands; we may be too late.

Here was no treasure to hide, no hangings to take down, no lands to secure; the poor carpenter needs do no more but lock the doors and away. He goes lightly that wants a load. If there be more pleasure in abundance, there is more security in a mean estate. The bustard or the ostrich when he is pursued can hardly get upon his wings, whereas the lark mounts with ease. The rich hath not so much advantage of the poor in enjoying, as the poor hath of the rich in leaving.

Now is Joseph come down into Egypt. Egypt was beholden to the name, as that whereto it did owe no less than their universal preservation. Well might it repay this act of hospitality to that name and blood.

The going down into Egypt had not so much difficulty as the staying there. Their absence from their country was little better than a banishment. But what was this other than to serve an apprenticeship in the house of bondage? To be any where save at home was irksome; but to be in Egypt so many years, amongst idolatrous pagans, must needs be painful to religious hearts. The command of their God, and the presence of Christ, makes amends for all. How long should they have thought it to see the temple

of God, if they had not had the God of the temple with them! how long to present their sacrifices at the altar of God, if they had not had him with them which made all sacrifices accepted, and which did accept the sacrifice of their hearts!

Herod was subtle in mocking the Wise Men, while he promised to worship him whom he meant to kill; now God makes the Wise Men to mock him in disappointing his expectation. It is just with God to punish those which would beguile others with illusion.

Great spirits are so much more impatient of disgrace. How did Herod now rage and fret, and vainly wish to have met with those false spies, and tell with what torments he would revenge their treachery, and curse himself for trusting strangers in so important a business!

The tyrant's suspicion would not let him rest long. Ere many days he sends to inquire of them whom he sent to inquire of Christ. The notice of their secret departure increaseth his jealousy; and now his anger runs mad, and his fear proves desperate.

All the infants of Bethlehem shall bleed for this one; and that he may make sure work, he cuts out to himself large measures both of time and place. It was but very lately that the Star appeared, that the Wise Men reappeared not. They asked for him that was born; they did not name when he was born. Herod, for more security, overreaches their time, and fetches into the slaughter all the children of two years' age. The priests and scribes had told him the town of Bethlehem must be the place of the Messias' nativity. He fetches in all the children of the coasts adjoining; yea, his own shall for the time be a Bethlehemite. A tyrannous guiltiness never thinks itself safe, but ever seeks to assure itself in the excess of cruelty. Doubtless, he which so privily inquired for Christ did as secretly brew this massacre. The mothers were set with their children on their laps, feeding them with the breast, or talking to them in the familiar language of their love, when suddenly the executioner rushes in, and snatches them from their arms; and at once pulling forth his commission and his knife, without regard to shrieks or tears, murders the innocent babe, and leaves the passionate mother in a mean between madness and death. What cursing of Herod! what wringing of hands! what condoling! what exclaiming was now in the streets of Bethlehem!

O bloody Herod, that couldst sacrifice so many harmless lives

to thine ambition! What could those infants have done? If it were thy person whereof thou wert afraid, what likelihood was it thou couldst live till those sucklings might endanger thee? This news might affect thy successors: it could not concern thee, if the heat of an impotent and furious envy had not made thee thirsty of blood. It is not long that thou shalt enjoy this cruelty. After a few hateful years thy soul shall feel the weight of so many innocents, of so many just curses. He for whose sake thou killedst so many shall strike thee with death, and then what wouldst thou have given to have been as one of those infants whom thou murderedst? In the mean time, when thine executioners returned, and told thee of their impartial despatch, thou smiledst to think how thou hadst defeated thy rival, and beguiled the Star, and deluded the prophecies; while God in heaven and his Son on earth laugh thee to scorn, and make thy rage an occasion of further glory to him whom thou meantest to suppress.

He that could take away the lives of others cannot protract his own. Herod is now sent home. The coast is clear for the return of that holy family: now God calls them from their exile.

Christ and his mother had not stayed so long out of the confines of the reputed visible Church but to teach us continuance under the cross. Sometimes God sees it good for us not to sip of the cup of affliction, but to make a diet-drink of it for constant and common use. If he allow us no other liquor for many years, we must take it off cheerfully, and know that it is but the measure of our betters.

Joseph and Mary stir not without a command: their departure, stay, removal, is ordered by the voice of God. If Egypt had been more tedious unto them, they durst not move their foot till they were bidden. It is good in our own business to follow reason or custom; but in God's business, if we have any other guide but himself, we presume, and cannot expect a blessing.

O the wonderful dispensation of God in concealing of himself from men! Christ was now some five years old. He bears himself as an infant; and knowing all things, neither takes nor gives notice of aught concerning his removal and disposing, but appoints that to be done by his angel which the angel could not have done but by him. Since he would take our nature, he would be a perfect child; suppressing the manifestation and exercise of that Godhead whereto that infant-nature was conjoined.

Even so, O Saviour, the humility of thine infancy was answerable to that of thy birth. The more thou hidest and abasest thyself for us, the more should we magnify thee, the more should we deject ourselves for thee. Unto Thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK II.

TO THE HONOURABLE GENERAL

SIR EDWARD CECIL, KNIGHT[a],

ALL HONOUR AND HAPPINESS.

Most honoured Sir,—The store of a good scribe is, according to our Saviour, both old and new. I would, if I durst, be ambitious of this only honour. Having therefore drawn forth those not frivolous thoughts out of the Old Testament, I fetch these following from the New. God is the same in both, as the body differs not with the age of the suit, with the change of robes. The old and new wine of holy Truth came both out of one vineyard; yet here may we safely say to the Word of his Father, as was said to the bridegroom of Cana, *Thou hast kept the best wine till the last.* The authority of both is equally sacred; the use admits no less difference than is betwixt a Saviour foreshadowed and come. The intermission of those military employments, which have won you just honour both in foreign nations and at home, is in this only gainful, that it yields you leisure to these happy thoughts, which shall more fully acquaint you with him that is at once the God of Hosts and the Prince of Peace. To the furtherance whereof these my poor labours shall do no thankless offices. In lieu of your noble favours to me, both at home and where you have merited command, nothing can be returned but humble acknowledgments and hearty prayers for the increase of your honour, and all happiness to yourself and your thrice worthy and virtuous lady, by him that is deeply obliged and truly devoted to you both,

JOS. HALL.

CHRIST AMONG THE DOCTORS.—Luke ii.

Even the spring shows us what we may hope for of the tree in summer. In his nonage therefore would our Saviour give us a

[a] [Third son of the second Earl of Exeter; created Baron Cecil of Putney.]

taste of his future proof, lest, if his perfection should have showed itself without warning to the world, it should have been entertained with more wonder than belief. Now this act of his childhood shall prepare the faith of men by fore-expectation.

Notwithstanding all this early demonstration of his divine graces, the incredulous Jews could afterwards say, *Whence hath this man his wisdom and great works?* What would they have said if he had suddenly leaped forth into the clear light of the world?

The sun would dazzle all eyes if he should break forth at his first rising into his full strength: now he hath both the day-star to go before him, and to bid men look for that glorious body, and the lively colours of the day to publish his approach, the eye is comforted, not hurt, by his appearance.

The parents of Christ went up yearly to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. The law was only for the males. I do not find the blessed Virgin bound to this voyage; the weaker sex received indulgence from God; yet she, knowing the spiritual profit of that journey, takes pains voluntarily to measure that long way every year. Piety regards not any distinction of sexes or degrees, neither yet doth God's acceptation; rather doth it please the mercy of the Highest more to reward that service, which though he like in all, yet out of favour he will not impose upon all. It could not be but that she whom the Holy Ghost overshadowed should be zealous of God's service. Those that will go no further than they are dragged in their religious exercises are no whit of kin to her whom all generations shall call blessed.

The child Jesus, in the minority of his age, went up with his parents to the holy solemnity; not this year only, but in all likelihood others also. He, in the power of whose Godhead and by the motion of whose Spirit all others ascended thither, would not himself stay at home. In all his examples he meant our instruction. This pious act of his nonage intended to lead our first years into timely devotion. The first liquor seasons the vessel for a long time after. It is every way good for a man to bear God's yoke, even from his infancy: it is the policy of the devil to discourage early holiness. He that goes out betimes in the morning is more like to despatch his journey than he that lingers till the day be spent.

This blessed family came not to look at the feast and be gone, but they duly stayed out all the appointed days of unleavened

bread. They and the rest of Israel could not want household business at home. Those secular affairs could not either keep them from repairing to Jerusalem or send them away immaturely. Worldly cares must give place to the sacred: except we will depart unblest, we must attend God's services till we may receive his dismission.

It was the fashion of those times and places that they went up and so returned by troops to those set meetings of their holy festivals. The whole parish of Nazareth went and came together. Good fellowship doth no way so well as in the passage to heaven. Much comfort is added by society to that journey which is of itself pleasant. It is an happy word, *Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord.* Mutual encouragement is none of the least benefits of our holy assemblies. Many sticks laid togother make a good fire, which if they lie single lose both their light and heat.

The feast ended, what should they do but return to Nazareth? God's services may not be so attended as that we should neglect our particular callings: himself calls us from his own house to ours, and takes pleasure to see a painful client. They are foully mistaken that think God cares for no other trade but devotion. Piety and diligence must keep meet changes with each other. Neither doth God less accept of our return to Nazareth than our going up to Jerusalem.

I cannot think that the blessed Virgin or good Joseph could be so negligent of their Divine charge as not to call the child Jesus to their setting forth from Jerusalem; but their back was no sooner turned upon the temple than his face was towards it. He had business in that place when theirs was ended; there he was both worshipped and represented. He in whom the Godhead dwelt bodily could do nothing without God; his true Father led him away from his supposed. Sometimes the affairs of our ordinary vocation may not grudge to yield unto spiritual occasions.

The parents of Christ knew him well to be of a disposition not strange, nor sullen and stoical, but sweet and sociable; and therefore they supposed he had spent the time and the way in company of their friends and neighbours. They do not suspect him wandered into the solitary fields, but when evening came they go to seek him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. If he had not wonted to converse formerly with them, he had not now been sought amongst them. Neither as God nor man doth he take

pleasure in a stern froward austerity and wild retiredness, but in a mild affableness and amiable conversation.

But, O blessed Virgin, who can express the sorrows of thy perplexed soul, when all that evening search could afford thee no news of thy son Jesus? Was not this one of those swords of Simeon which should pierce through thy tender breast? How didst thou chide thy credulous neglect in not observing so precious a charge, and blame thine eyes for once looking beside this object of thy love! How didst thou, with thy careful husband, spend that restless night in mutual expostulations and bemoanings of your loss! how many suspicious imaginations did that while rack thy grieved spirit! Perhaps thou mightest doubt, lest they which laid for him by Herod's command at his birth had now by the secret instigation of Archelaus surprised him in his childhood: or it may be, thou thoughtest thy Divine Son had now withdrawn himself from the earth, and returned to his heavenly glory without warning: or peradventure, thou studiest with thyself whether any carelessness on thy behalf had not given occasion to this absence.

O dear Saviour, who can miss and not mourn for thee? Never any soul conceived thee by faith that was less afflicted with the sense of thy desertion than comforted with the joy of thy presence. Just is that sorrow, and those tears seasonable, that are bestowed upon thy loss. What comfort are we capable of while we want thee? what relish is there in these earthly delights without thee? what is there to mitigate our passionate discomforts, if not from thee? Let thyself loose, O my soul, to the fulness of sorrow when thou findest thyself bereaved of him in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and deny to receive comfort from any thing save from his return.

In vain is Christ sought among his kindred according to the flesh. So far are they still from giving us their aid to find the true Messias, that they lead us from him.

Back again therefore are Joseph and Mary gone to seek him at Jerusalem. She goes about in the city, by the streets and by the open places, and *seeks him whom her soul loveth: she sought him* for the time, *and found him not.* Do we think she spared her search? The evening of her return she hastes to the inn where she had left him, where missing him, she inquires of every one she met, *Have you not seen him whom my soul loveth?*

At last, the third day, she finds him in the temple. One day

was spent in the journey towards Galilee, another in the return to Jerusalem, the third day recovers him. He, who would rise again the third day, and be found amongst the living, now also would the third day be found of his parents after the sorrow of his absence.

But where wert thou, O blessed Jesu, for the space of these three days? where didst thou bestow thyself, or who tended thee while thou wert thus alone at Jerusalem? I know, if Jerusalem should have been as unkind to thee as Bethlehem, thou couldst have commanded the heavens to harbour thee; and if men did not minister to thee thou couldst have commanded the service of angels; but since the form of a servant called thee to a voluntary homeliness, whether it pleased thee to exercise thyself thus early with the difficulties of a stranger, or to provide miraculously for thyself, I inquire not, since thou revealest not: only this I know, that hereby thou intendedst to teach thy parents that thou couldest live without them; and that, not of any indigency, but out of a gracious dispensation, thou wouldest ordinarily depend upon their care.

In the meantime thy divine wisdom could not but foreknow all these corroding thoughts wherewith the heart of thy dear mother must needs bleed through this sudden dereliction; yet wouldest thou leave her for the time to her sorrow. Even so, O Saviour, thou thoughtest fit to visit her that bore thee with this early affliction. Never any loved thee whom thou dost not sometimes exercise with the grief of missing thee; that both we may be more careful to hold thee and more joyful in recovering thee. Thou hast said, and canst not lie, *I am with you to the end of the world;* but even while thou art really present, thou thinkest good to be absent unto our apprehensions.

Yet if thou leave us, thou wilt not forsake us; if thou leave us for our humiliation, thou wilt not forsake us to our final discomfort. Thou mayest for three days hide thyself, but then we shall find thee in the temple. None ever sought thee with a sincere desire of whom thou wert not found. Thou wilt not be either so little absent as not to whet our appetites, nor so long as to fainten the heart.

After three days we shall find thee; and where should we rather hope to find thee than in the temple? There is the habitation for the God of Israel; there is thy restingplace for ever. O all ye that are grieved with the want of your Saviour, see

where you must seek him. In vain shall ye hope to find him in the streets, in the taverns, in the theatres: seek him in his holy temple, seek him with piety, seek him with faith; there shall ye meet him, there shall ye recover him.

While children of that age were playing in the streets, Christ was found sitting in the temple, not to gaze on the outward glory of that house, or on the golden candlesticks or tables, but to hear and appose the doctors. He who as God gave them all the wisdom they had, as the Son of man hearkens to the wisdom he had given them. He who sat in their hearts as the Author of all learning and knowledge, sits in the midst of their school as an humble disciple; that by learning of them he might teach all the younger sort humility and due attendance upon their instructors. He could at the first have taught the great rabbins of Israel the deep mysteries of God, but because he was not yet called by his Father to the public function of a teacher, he contents himself to hear with diligence, and to ask with modesty, and to teach only by insinuation. Let those consider this which will needs run as soon as they can go; and when they find ability, think they need not stay for a further vocation of God or men. Open your eyes, ye rathe ripe invaders of God's chair, and see your Saviour in his younger years, not sitting in the eminent pulpits of the doctors, but in the lowly floors of the auditors. See him that could have taught the angels, listening in his minority to the voice of men. Who can think much to learn of the ancients, when he looks upon the Son of God sitting at the feet of the doctors of Israel? First he hears, then he asks. How much more doth it concern us to be hearers, ere we offer to be teachers of others! He gathers that hears, he spends that teacheth; if we spend before we gather, we shall soon prove bankrupts.

When he hath heard, he asks, and after that, he answers. Doubtless those very questions were instructions, and meant to teach more than to learn. Never had these great rabbins heard the voice of such a tutor, in whom they might see the wisdom of God so concealing itself, that yet it would be known to be there. No marvel then if they all wondered at his understanding and answers. Their eyes saw nothing but human weakness, their ears heard divine sublimity of matter; betwixt what they saw and what they heard, they could not but be distracted with a doubting admiration.

And why did ye not, O ye Jewish teachers, remember, that *to*

us a Child is born, and unto us a Son is given: and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace? Why did ye not now bethink yourselves what the Star, the Sages, the Angels, the Shepherds, Zachary, Simeon, Anna, had premonished you? Fruitless is the wonder that endeth not in faith. No light is sufficient where the eyes are held through unbelief or prejudice.

The doctors were not more amazed to hear so profound a childhood, than the parents of Christ were to see him among the doctors. The joy of finding him did strive with the astonishment of finding him thus.

And now not Joseph, (he knew how little right he had to that divine Son,) but Mary breaks forth into a loving expostulation, *Son, why hast thou dealt so with us?* That she might not seem to take upon her as an imperious mother, it is like she reserved this question till she had him alone; wherein she meant rather to express grief than correption. Only herein the blessed Virgin offended, that her inconsideration did not suppose (as it was) that some higher respects than could be due to flesh and blood called away the Son of God from her that was the daughter of man. She that was but the mother of humanity should not have thought that the business of God must for her sake be neglected.

We are all partial to ourselves naturally, and prone to the regard of our own rights. Questionless this gracious saint would not for all the world have willingly preferred her own attendance to that of her God: through heedlessness she doth so: her Son and Saviour is her monitor; out of his divine love reforming her natural; *How is it that ye sought me? Know ye not that I must go about my Father's business?*

Immediately before the blessed Virgin had said, *Thy father and I sought thee with heavy hearts:* wherein both, according to the supposition of the world, she called Joseph the father of Christ, and according to the fashion of a dutiful wife she names her Joseph before herself. She well knew that Joseph had nothing but a name in this business; she knew how God had dignified her beyond him; yet she says, *Thy father and I sought thee.*

The Son of God stands not upon contradiction to his mother, but, leading her thoughts from his supposed father to his true, from earth to heaven, he answers, *Knew ye not that I must go*

about my Father's business? It was honour enough to her that he had vouchsafed to take flesh of her; it was his eternal honour that he was God of God, the everlasting Son of the heavenly Father. Good reason therefore was it that the respects to flesh should give place to the God of spirits.

How well contented was holy Mary with so just an answer! How doth she now again in her heart renew her answer to the angel, *Behold the servant of the Lord, be it according to thy word!*

We are all the sons of God in another kind. Nature and the world thinks we should attend them. We are not worthy to say, "We have a Father in heaven," if we cannot steal away from these earthly distractions, and employ ourselves in the services of our God.

CHRIST'S BAPTISM.—Matt. iii.

John did every way forerun Christ; not so much in the time of his birth as in his office. Neither was there more unlikeliness in their disposition and carriage than similitude in their function. Both did preach and baptize; only John baptized by himself, our Saviour by his disciples: our Saviour wrought miracles by himself, by his disciples; John wrought none by either: wherein Christ meant to show himself a Lord, and John a servant; and John meant to approve himself a true servant to him whose harbinger he was.

He that leaped in the womb of his mother when his Saviour, then newly conceived came in presence, bestirred himself when he was brought forth into the light of the Church, to the honour and service of his Saviour. He did the same before Christ which Christ charged his disciples to do after him, *Preach and baptize.* The gospel ran always in one tenor, and was never but like itself; so it became the word of him in whom there is no shadow by turning; and whose word it is, *I am Jehovah, I change not.*

It was fit that he which had the prophets, the star, the angel, to foretell his coming into the world, should have his usher to go before him, when he would notify himself to the world. John was the voice of a crier, Christ was the Word of his Father: it was fit this voice should make a noise to the world ere the Word of the Father should speak to it.

John's note was still, *Repentance; the axe to the root, the fan*

to the floor, the chaff to the fire: as his raiment was rough, so was his tongue; and if his food were wild honey, his speech was stinging locusts. Thus must the way be made for Christ in every heart. Plausibility is no fit preface to regeneration. If the heart of man had continued upright, God might have been entertained without contradiction; but now violence must be offered to our corruption ere we can have room for grace. If the great Way-maker do not cast down hills and raise up valleys in the bosoms of men there is no passage for Christ. Never will Christ come into that soul where the herald of repentance hath not been before him.

That Saviour of ours, who from eternity lay hid in the counsel of God, who in the fulness of time so came that he lay hid in the womb of his mother for the space of forty weeks, after he was come thought fit to lie hid in Nazareth for the space of thirty years, now at last begins to show himself to the world, and comes from Galilee to Jordan. He that was God always, and might have been perfect man in an instant, would by degrees rise to the perfection both of his manhood and execution of his mediatorship; to teach us the necessity of leisure in spiritual proceedings, that many suns and successions of seasons and means must be stayed for ere we can attain our maturity; and that when we are ripe for the employments of God we should no less willingly leave our obscurity than we took the benefit of it for our preparation.

He that was formerly circumcised, would now be baptized. What is baptism but an evangelical circumcision? What was circumcision but a legal baptism? One both supplied and succeeded the other, yet the Author of both will undergo both. He would be circumcised, to sanctify his Church that was, and baptized, to sanctify his Church that should be: that so, in both testaments, he might open a way into heaven. There was in him neither filthiness nor foreskin of corruption that should need either knife or water. He came not to be a Saviour for himself, but for us; we are all uncleanness and uncircumcision: he would therefore have that done to his most pure body, which should be of force to clear our impure souls; thus making himself sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

His baptism gives virtue to ours. His last action (or rather passion) was his baptizing with blood; his first was his baptization with water; both of them wash the world from their sins. Yea, this latter did not only wash the souls of men, but washeth

that very water by which we are washed: from hence is that made both clean and holy, and can both cleanse and hallow us. And if the very handkerchief which touched his apostles had power of cure, how much more that water which the sacred body of Christ touched!

Christ comes far to seek his baptism, to teach us, for whose sake he was baptized, to wait upon the ordinances of God, and to sue for the favour of spiritual blessings. They are worthless commodities that are not worth seeking for. It is rarely seen that God is found of any man unsought for. That desire which only makes us capable of good things cannot stand with neglect.

John durst not baptize unbidden; his Master sent him to do this service; and behold the Master comes to his servant to call for the participation of that privilege which he himself had instituted and enjoined. How willingly should we come to our spiritual superiors for our part in those mysteries which God hath left in their keeping! yea, how gladly should we come to that Christ who gives us these blessings, who is given to us in them!

This seemed too great an honour for the modesty of John to receive. If his mother could say, when her blessed cousin the Virgin Mary came to visit her, *Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* how much more might he say so when the Divine Son of that mother came to call for a favour from him! *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* O holy Baptist, if there were not a greater born of woman than thou, yet thou couldest not be born of a woman, and not need to be baptized of thy Saviour. He baptized with fire, thou with water. Little would thy water have availed thee without his fire. If he had not baptized thee, how wert thou sanctified from the womb? There can be no flesh without filthiness; neither thy supernatural conception nor thy austere life could exempt thee from the need of baptism. Even those that have not lived to sin after the similitude of Adam, yet are they so tainted with Adam, that unless the second Adam cleanse them by his baptism they are hopeless.

There is no less use of baptism unto all than there is certainty of the need of baptism. John baptized without, Christ within. The more holy a man is, the more sensible he is of his unholiness. No carnal man could have said, *I have need to be baptized of thee;* neither can he find what he is the better for a little font-

water. The sense of our wretchedness and the valuation of our spiritual helps is the best trial of our regeneration.

Our Saviour doth not deny that either John hath need to be baptized of him, or that it is strange that he should come to be baptized of John, but he will needs thus far both honour John and disparage himself to be baptized of his messenger. He that would take flesh of the Virgin, education from his parents, sustenance from his creatures, will take baptism from John. It is the praise of his mercy that he will stoop so low as to be beholden to his creatures, which from him receive their being and power both to take and give.

Yet not so much respect to John as obedience to his Father drew him to this point of humiliation: *Thus it behoves us to fulfil all righteousness.* The counsels and appointments of God are righteousness itself. There needs no other motive either to the servant or the son, than the knowledge of those righteous purposes. This was enough to lead a faithful man through all difficulties and inconveniences, neither will it admit of any reply or any demur. John yieldeth to this honour which his Saviour puts upon him in giving baptism to the author of it. He baptized others to the remission of their sins, now he baptizes him by whom they are remitted, both to the baptizer and to others.

No sooner is Christ baptized than he comes forth of the water. The element is of force but during the use; it turns common when that is past. Neither is the water sooner poured on his head than the heavens are opened, and the Holy Ghost descendeth upon that head which was baptized. The heavens are never shut while either of the sacraments is duly administered and received; neither do the heavens ever thus open without the descent of the Holy Ghost. But now that the God of heaven is baptized, they open unto him, which are opened to all the faithful by him; and that Holy Ghost which proceedeth from him, together with the Father, joins with the Father in a sensible testimony of him, that now the world might see what interest he had in the heavens, in the Father, in the Holy Spirit, and might expect nothing but Divine from the entrance of such a Mediator.

CHRIST TEMPTED.—Matthew iv; Mark i; Luke iv.

No sooner is Christ come out of the water of baptism than he enters into the fire of temptation. No sooner is the Holy Spirit

descended upon his head in the form of a dove, than he is led by the Spirit to be tempted. No sooner doth God say, *This is my Son,* than Satan says, *If thou be the Son of God.* It is not in the power either of the gifts or seals of grace to deliver us from the assaults of Satan; they may have the force to repel evil suggestions, they have none to prevent them; yea, the more we are engaged unto God by our public vows and his pledges of favour, so much more busy and violent is the rage of that evil one to encounter us. We are no sooner stepped forth into the field of God, than he labours to wrest our weapons out of our hands or to turn them against us.

The voice from heaven acknowledged Christ to be the Son of God. This divine testimony did not allay the malice of Satan, but exasperate it. Now that venomous serpent swells with inward poison, and hastes to assail him whom God hath honoured from heaven. O God, how should I look to escape the suggestions of that wicked one, when the Son of thy love cannot be free; when even grace itself draws on enmity? That enmity that spared not to strike at the head, will he forbear the weakest and remotest limb? Arm thou me therefore with an expectation of that evil I cannot avoid. Make thou me as strong as he is malicious. Say to my soul also, *Thou art my son;* and let Satan do his worst.

All the time of our Saviour's obscurity I do not find him set upon: now that he looks forth to the public execution of his divine office, Satan bends his forces against him. Our privacy, perhaps, may sit down in peace; but never did man endeavour a common good without opposition. It is a sign that both the work is holy and the agent faithful, when we meet with strong affronts.

We have reason to be comforted with nothing so much as with resistance. If we were not in a way to do good, we should find no rubs. Satan hath no cause to molest his own, and that while they go about his own service. He desires nothing more than to make us smooth paths to sin; but when we would turn our feet to holiness, he blocks up the way with temptations.

Who can wonder enough at the sauciness of that bold spirit that dares to set upon the Son of the everliving God? who can wonder enough at thy meekness and patience, O Saviour, that wouldst be tempted? He wanted not malice and presumption to assault thee; thou wantedst not humility to endure those assaults. I should stand amazed at this voluntary dispensation of thine, but

that I see the susception of our human nature lays thee open to this condition. It is necessarily incident to manhood to be liable to temptations. Thou wouldst not have put on flesh, if thou hadst meant utterly to put off this consequence of our infirmity.

If the state of innocence could have been any defence against evil motions, the first Adam had not been tempted, much less the second. It is not the presenting of temptations that can hurt us, but their entertainment. Ill counsel is the fault of the giver, not of the refuser. We cannot forbid lewd eyes to look in at our windows, we may shut our doors against their entrance: it is no less our praise to have resisted than Satan's blame to suggest evil.

Yea, O blessed Saviour, how glorious was it for thee, how happy for us, that thou wert tempted! Had not Satan tempted thee, how shouldst thou have overcome? Without blows there can be no victory, no triumph. How had thy power been manifested, if no adversary had tried thee? The first Adam was tempted and vanquished; the second Adam, to repay and repair that foil, doth vanquish in being tempted. Now have we not a Saviour and High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but such an one as was in all things tempted in like sort, yet without sin. How boldly therefore may we go unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace of help in time of need! Yea, this duel was for us! Now we see by this conflict of our Almighty Champion what manner of adversary we have; how he fights, how he is resisted, how overcome. Now our very temptation affords us comfort in that we see, the dearer we are unto God the more obnoxious we are to this trial; neither can we be discouraged by the heinousness of those evils whereto we are moved, since we see the Son of God solicited to infidelity, covetousness, idolatry. How glorious therefore was it for thee, O Saviour, how happy for us, that thou wert tempted!

Where then wast thou tempted, O blessed Jesu? or whither wentest thou to meet with our great adversary? I do not see thee led into the market-place, or any other part of the city, or thy homestead of Nazareth, but into the vast wilderness, the habitation of beasts, a place that carrieth in it both horror and opportunity. Why wouldst thou thus retire thyself from men? But as confident champions are wont to give advantage of ground or weapon to their antagonist, that the glory of their victory may be the greater, so wouldest thou, O Saviour, in this conflict with

our common enemy, yield him his own terms for circumstances, that thine honour and his foil may be the more. Solitariness is no small help to the speed of a temptation: *Woe to him that is alone; for if he fall, there is not a second to lift him up.* Those that out of an affectation of holiness seek for solitude in rocks and caves of the deserts, do no other than run into the mouth of the danger of temptation, while they think to avoid it. It was enough for thee, to whose divine power the gates of hell were weakness, thus to challenge the prince of darkness. Our care must be always to eschew all occasions of spiritual danger, and (what we may) to get us out of the reach of temptations.

But, O the depth of the wisdom of God! How camest thou, O Saviour, to be thus tempted? That Spirit whereby thou wast conceived as man, and which was one with thee and the Father as God, led thee into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan. While thou taughtest us to pray to thy Father, *Lead us not into temptation*, thou meantest to instruct us, that if the same Spirit led us not into this perilous way, we go not into it. We have still the same conduct. Let the path be what it will, how can we miscarry in the hand of a Father? Now may we say to Satan, as thou didst unto Pilate, *Thou couldst have no power over me, except it were given thee from above.*

The Spirit led thee; it did not drive thee: here was a sweet invitation; no compulsion of violence. So absolutely conformable was thy will to thy Deity, as if both thy natures had but one volition. In this first draught of thy bitter potion thy soul said in a real subjection, *Not my will, but thy will be done.* We imitate thee, O Saviour, though we cannot reach to thee. All thine are led by thy Spirit: O teach us to forget that we have wills of our own.

The Spirit led thee; thine invincible strength did not animate thee into this combat uncalled. What do we weaklings so far presume upon our abilities or success, as that we dare thrust ourselves upon temptations, unbidden, unwarranted? Who can pity the shipwreck of those mariners which will needs put forth and hoist sails in a tempest?

Forty days did our Saviour spend in the wilderness, fasting and solitary, all which time was worn out in temptation: however, the last brunt, because it was most violent, is only expressed. Now could not the adversary complain of disadvantage, while he had the full scope both of time and place to do his worst.

And why did it please thee, O Saviour, to fast forty days and forty nights, unless, as Moses fasted forty days at the delivery of the Law, and Elias at the restitution of the Law, so thou thoughtest fit, at the accomplishment of the Law and the promulgation of the Gospel, to fulfil the time of both these types of thine: wherein thou intendedst our wonder, not our imitation; not our imitation of the time, though of the act. Here were no faulty desires of the flesh in thee to be tamed; no possibility of a freer and more easy ascent of the soul to God, that could be affected of thee who wast perfectly united unto God; but, as for us thou wouldst suffer death, so for us thou wouldst suffer hunger, that we might learn by fasting to prepare ourselves for temptations. In fasting so long, thou intendedst the manifestation of thy power; in fasting no longer, the truth of thy manhood. Moses and Elias, through the miraculous sustentation of God, fasted so long, without any question made of the truth of their bodies: so long therefore thou thoughtest good to fast, as by the reason of these precedents might be without prejudice of thy humanity; which if it should have pleased thee to support, as thou couldst, without means, thy very power might have opened the mouth of cavils against the verity of thy human nature. That thou mightest therefore well approve that there was no difference betwixt thee and us but sin, thou that couldst have fasted without hunger, and lived without meat, wouldst both feed and fast and hunger.

Who can be discouraged with the scantness of friends or bodily provisions, when he sees his Saviour thus long destitute of all earthly comforts, both of society and sustenance?

O the policy and malice of that old serpent! when he sees Christ bewray some infirmity of nature in being hungry, then he lays sorest at him by temptations. His eye was never off from our Saviour all the time of his sequestration; and now that he thinks he espies any one part to lie open, he drives at it with all his might. We have to do with an adversary no less vigilant than malicious, who will be sure to watch all opportunities of our mischief; and where he sees any advantage of weakness will not neglect it. How should we stand upon our guard for prevention; that both we may not give him occasions of our hurt, nor take hurt by those we have given!

When our Saviour was hungry, Satan tempts him in matter of food, not then of wealth or glory. He well knows both what baits to fish withal, and when and how to lay them. How safe and

happy shall we be, if we shall bend our greatest care where we discern the most danger!

In every temptation there is an appearance of good, whether of the body, of mind, or estate. The first is, the *lust of the flesh*, in any carnal desire; the second, the *pride of* heart and *life*; the third, the *lust of the eyes*.

To all these the first Adam is tempted, and in all miscarried; the second Adam is tempted to them all, and overcometh. The first man was tempted to carnal appetite by the forbidden fruit; to pride, by the suggestion of being as God; to covetousness, in the ambitious desire of knowing good and evil. Satan, having found all the motions so successful with the first Adam in his innocent estate, will now tread the same steps in his temptations of the second. The stones must be made bread; there is the motion to a carnal appetite: the guard and attendance of angels must be presumed on; there is a motion to pride: the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them must be offered; there to covetousness and ambition.

Satan could not but have heard God say, *This is my well-beloved Son.* He had heard the message and the carol of the angels; he saw the star, and the journey and offerings of the sages; he could not but take notice of the gratulations of Zachary, Simeon, Anna: he well knew the predictions of the prophets; yet now that he saw Christ fainting with hunger, as not comprehending how infirmities could consist with a Godhead, he can say, *If thou be the Son of God.* Had not Satan known that the Son of God was to come into the world, he had never said, *If thou be the Son of God.* His very supposition convinces him. The ground of his temptation answers itself. If therefore Christ seemed to be a mere man, because after forty days he was hungry, why was he not confessed more than a man in that for forty days he hungered not?

The motive of the temptation is worse than the motion, *If thou be the Son of God.* Satan could not choose another suggestion of so great importance. All the work of our redemption, of our salvation, depends upon this one truth, Christ is the Son of God. How should he else have ransomed the world? how should he have done, how should he have suffered, that which was satisfactory to his Father's wrath? how should his actions or passions have been valuable to the sin of all the world? what marvel is it, if we that are sons by adoption be assaulted with the doubts of

our interest in God, when the natural Son, the Son of his Essence, is thus tempted? Since all our comfort consists in this point, here must needs be laid the chief battery, and here must be placed our strongest defence.

To turn stones into bread had been no more faulty in itself than to turn water into wine; but to do this in a distrust of his Father's providence, to abuse his power and liberty in doing it, to work a miracle of Satan's choice, had been disagreeable to the Son of God.

There is nothing more ordinary with our spiritual enemy than by occasion of want to move us to unwarrantable courses: "Thou art poor, steal; thou canst not rise by honest means, use indirect."

How easy had it been for our Saviour to have confounded Satan by the power of his Godhead! but he rather chooses to vanquish him by the sword of the Spirit, that he might teach us how to resist and overcome the powers of darkness. If he had subdued Satan by the almighty power of the Deity, we might have had what to wonder at, not what to imitate: now he useth that weapon which may be familiar unto us, that he may teach our weakness how to be victorious.

Nothing in heaven or earth can beat the forces of hell but the word of God. How carefully should we furnish ourselves with this powerful munition! how should our hearts and mouths be full of it: *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes. O take not from me the words of truth. Let them be my songs in the house of my pilgrimage: so shall I make answer to my blasphemers.*

What needed Christ to have answered Satan at all, if it had not been to teach us that temptations must not have their way; but must be answered by resistance, and resisted by the word?

I do not hear our Saviour aver himself to be a God, against the blasphemous insinuation of Satan; neither do I see him working this miraculous conversion, to prove himself the Son of God; but most wisely he takes away the ground of the temptation. Satan had taken it for granted that man cannot be sustained without bread, and therefore infers the necessity of making bread of stones. Our Saviour shows him, from an infallible word, that he had mislaid his suggestion, that man *lives* not by usual food only, but *by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.* He can either sustain without bread, as he did Moses and Elias; or with a miraculous bread, as the Israelites with manna; or send ordi-

nary means miraculously, as food to his prophet by the ravens; or miraculously multiply ordinary means, as the meal and oil to the Sareptan widow. All things are sustained by his almighty word.

Indeed we live by food, but not by any virtue that is without God, without the concurrence of whose providence bread would rather choke than nourish us. Let him withdraw his hand from his creatures in their greatest abundance, we perish. Why do we therefore bend our eyes on the means, and not look up to the hand that gives the blessing? What so necessary dependence hath the blessing upon the creature, if our prayers hold them not together? As we may not neglect the means, so we may not neglect the procurement of a blessing upon the means; nor be unthankful to the hand that gives the blessing.

In the first assault, Satan moves Christ to doubt of his Father's providence, and to use unlawful means to help himself; in the next, he moves him to presume upon his Father's protection and the service of his blessed angels. He grounds the first upon a conceit of want; the next, of abundance. If he be in extremes, it is all to one end, to mislead unto evil. If we cannot be driven down to despair, he labours to lift us up to presumption. It is not one foil that can put this bold spirit out of countenance. Temptations, like waves, break one in the neck of another. While we are in this warfare, we must make account that the repulse of one temptation doth but invite to another.

That blessed Saviour of ours, that was content to be led from Jordan into the wilderness for the advantage of the first temptation, yields to be led from the wilderness to Jerusalem for the advantage of the second. The place doth not a little avail to the act. The wilderness was fit for a temptation arising from want; it was not fit for a temptation moving to vainglory; the populous city was the fittest for such a motion. Jerusalem was the glory of the world; the temple was the glory of Jerusalem; the pinnacles, the highest piece of the temple; there is Christ content to be set for the opportunity of temptation.

O Saviour of men, how can we wonder enough at this humility of thine, that thou wouldest so far abase thyself as to suffer thy pure and sacred body to be transported by the presumptuous and malicious hand of that unclean spirit! It was not his power, it was thy patience, that deserves our admiration.

Neither can this seem over-strange to us, when we consider

that if Satan be the head of wicked men, wicked men are the members of Satan. What was Pilate, or the Jews that persecuted thine innocence, but limbs of this devil? and why are we then amazed to see thee touched and locally transported by the head, when we see thee yielding thyself over to be crucified by the members? If Satan did the worse and greater mediately by their hands, no marvel if he do the less and easier immediately by his own; yet neither of them without thy voluntary dispensation. He could not have looked at thee without thee.

And if the Son of God did thus suffer his own holy and precious body to be carried by Satan, what wonder is it if that enemy have sometimes power given him over the sinful bodies of the adopted sons of God? It is not the strength of faith that can secure us from the outward violences of that Evil One. This difference I find betwixt his spiritual and bodily assaults: those are beaten back by the shield of faith; these admit not of such repulse. As the best man may be lame, blind, diseased; so, through the permission of God, he may be bodily vexed by an old manslayer. Grace was never given us for a target against external afflictions.

Methinks I see Christ hoisted upon the highest battlements of the temple, whose very roof was an hundred and thirty cubits high; and Satan standing by him, with this speech in his mouth: "Well then; since in the matter of nourishment thou wilt needs depend upon thy Father's providence, that he can without means sustain thee, take now further trial of that providence in thy miraculous preservation. Cast thyself down from this height. Behold, thou art here in Jerusalem, the famous and Holy City of the world. Here thou art, on the top of the pinnacle of that temple which is dedicated to thy Father, and, if thou be God, to thyself. The eyes of all men are now fixed upon thee. There cannot be devised a more ready way to spread thy glory and to proclaim thy Deity than by casting thyself headlong to the earth. All the world will say there is more in thee than a man; and for danger, there can be none. What can hurt him that is the Son of God? And wherefore serves that glorious guard of angels, which have by divine commission taken upon them the charge of thine humanity? Since therefore in one act thou mayest be both safe and celebrated, trust thy Father, and those thy serviceable spirits, with thine assured preservation; *Cast thyself down.*"

And why didst thou not, O thou Malignant Spirit, endeavour to cast down my Saviour by those same presumptuous hands that brought him up, since the descent is more easy than the raising up? Was it for that it had not been so great an advantage to thee that he should fall by thy means as by his own? Falling into sin was more than to fall from the pinnacle. Still, thy care and suit is to make us authors to ourselves of evil. Thou gainest nothing by our bodily hurt, if the soul be safe. Or was it rather for that thou couldest not? I doubt not but thy malice could as well have served to have offered this measure to himself as to his holy apostle soon after, but he that bounded thy power tethers thee shorter. Thou couldest not, thou canst not do what thou wouldst. He that would permit thee to carry him up binds thy hands from casting him down. And woe were it for us if thou wert not ever stinted.

Why did Satan carry up Christ so high, but on purpose that his fall might be the more deadly? So deals he still with us; he exalts us, that we may be dangerously abased: he puffs men up with swelling thoughts of their own worthiness, that they may be vile in the eyes of God, and fall into condemnation. It is the manner of God, to cast down that he may raise; to abase, that he may exalt: contrarily, Satan raises up that he may throw down; and intends nothing but our dejection in our advancement.

Height of place gives opportunity of temptation. Thus busy is that Wicked One in working against the members of Christ. If any of them be in eminence above others, those he labours most to ruinate. They had need to stand fast that stand high; both there is more danger of their falling, and more hurt in their fall.

He that had presumed thus far to tempt the Lord of Life would fain now dare him also to presume upon his Deity: *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down.*

There is not a more tried shaft in all his quiver than this; a persuasion to men to bear themselves too bold upon the favour of God. "Thou art the elect and redeemed of God; sin, because grace hath abounded; sin, that it may abound. Thou art safe enough, though thou offend: be not too much an adversary to thine own liberty." False spirit! it is no liberty to sin; but servitude rather: there is liberty; but in the freedom from sin. Every one of us that hath the hope of sons must *purge himself,*

even as he is pure that hath redeemed us. *We are bought with a price, therefore must we glorify God in our body and spirits; for they are God's.* Our sonship teaches us awe and obedience; and therefore, because we are sons, we will not cast ourselves down into sin.

How idly do Satan and wicked men measure God by the crooked line of their own misconceit? Ywis Christ cannot be the Son of God unless he cast himself down from the pinnacle, unless he come down from the cross. God is not merciful unless he honour them in all their desires; not just, unless he take speedy vengeance where they require it. But when they have spent their folly upon these vain imaginations, Christ is the Son of God, though he stay on the top of the temple: God will be merciful, though we miscarry; and just, though sinners seem lawless; neither will he be any other than he is, or measured by any rule but himself.

But what is this I see? Satan himself, with a Bible under his arm, with a text in his mouth, *It is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee?* How still in that wicked one doth subtlety strive with presumption! Who could not but over-wonder at this, if he did not consider that since the devil dared to touch the sacred body of Christ with his hand, he may well touch the Scriptures of God with his tongue! Let no man henceforth marvel to hear heretics or hypocrites quote Scriptures, when Satan himself hath not spared to cite them. What are they the worse for this more than that holy body which is transported? Some have been poisoned by their meats and drinks, yet either these nourish us or nothing.

It is not the letter of the Scripture that can carry it, but the sense; if we divide these two, we profane and abuse that word we allege.

And wherefore doth this foul spirit urge a text but for imitation, for prevention, and for success? Christ had alleged a Scripture unto him; he realleges Scripture unto Christ. At leastwise he will counterfeit an imitation of the Son of God. Neither is it in this alone: what one act ever passed the hand of God which Satan did not apishly attempt to second? If we follow Christ in the outward action with contrary intentions, we follow Satan in following Christ. Or perhaps Satan meant to make Christ hereby weary of this weapon; as we see fashions when they are taken up of the unworthy are cast off by the

great. It was doubtless one cause why Christ afterward forbade the devil even to confess the truth, because his mouth was a slander. But chiefly doth he this for a better colour of his temptation. He gilds over this false metal with Scripture that it may pass current. Even now is Satan transformed into an angel of light, and will seem godly for a mischief. If hypocrites make a fair show to deceive with a glorious lustre of holiness, we see whence they borrowed it.

How many thousand souls are betrayed by the abuse of that word whose use is sovereign and saving! No devil is so dangerous as the religious devil. If good meat turn to the nourishment not of nature but of the disease, we may not forbear to feed, but endeavour to purge the body of those evil humours which cause the stomach to work against itself. O God, thou that hast given us light, give us clear and sound eyes, that we may take comfort of that light thou hast given us. Thy word is holy, make our hearts so; and then shall they find that word not more true than cordial. Let not this divine table of thine be made a snare to our souls.

What can be a better act than to speak Scripture? It were a wonder if Satan should do a good thing well. He cites Scripture then but with mutilation and distortion; it comes not out of his mouth but maimed and perverted; one piece is left, all misapplied. Those that wrest or mangle Scripture for their own turn, it is easy to see from what school they come. Let us take the word from the author, not from the usurper. David would not doubt to eat that sheep which he pulled out of the mouth of the bear or lion.

He shall give his angels charge over thee: O comfortable assurance of our protection! God's children never go unattended. Like unto great princes, we walk ever in the midst of our guard; though invisible, yet true, careful, powerful. What creatures are so glorious as the angels of heaven? yet their Maker hath set them to serve us. Our adoption makes us at once great and safe. We may be contemptible and ignominious in the eyes of the world, but the angels of God observe us the while, and scorn not to wait upon us in our homeliest occasions. The sun or the light may we keep out of our houses, the air we cannot; much less these spirits that are more simple and immaterial. No walls, no bolts can sever them from our sides; they accompany us in dungeons, they go with us into our exile. How can we either fear

danger or complain of solitariness while we have so unseparable, so glorious companions?

Is our Saviour distasted with Scripture because Satan mislays it in his dish? Doth he not rather snatch this sword out of that impure hand, and beat Satan with the weapon which he abuseth? *It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

The Scripture is one, as that God whose it is. Where it carries an appearance of difficulty or inconvenience, it needs no light to clear it but that which it hath in itself. All doubts that may arise from it are fully answered by collation.

It is true, that God hath taken this care and given this charge of his own; he will have them kept not in their sins; they may trust him, they may not tempt him; he meant to encourage their faith, not their presumption. To cast ourselves upon any immediate providence when means fail not, is to disobey instead of believing God. We may challenge God on his word, we may not strain him beyond it; we may make account of what he promised, we may not subject his promises to unjust examinations; and where no need is, make trial of his power, justice, mercy, by devices of our own.

All the devils in hell could not elude the force of this divine answer; and now Satan sees how vainly he tempteth Christ to tempt God.

Yet again, for all this, do I see him setting upon the Son of God. Satan is not foiled when he is resisted. Neither diffidence nor presumption can fasten upon Christ. He shall be tried with honour. As some expert fencer that challenges at all weapons, so doth his great enemy. In vain shall we plead our skill in some if we fail in any. It must be our wisdom to be prepared for all kind of assaults, as those that hold towns and forts do not only defend themselves from incursions, but from the cannon and the pioneer.

Still doth that subtle serpent traverse his ground for an advantage. The temple is not high enough for his next temptation; he therefore carries up Christ to the top of an exceeding high mountain. All enemies in pitched fields strive for the benefit of the hill, or river, or wind, or sun. That which his servant Balak did by his instigation, himself doth now immediately; change places, in hope of prevailing. If the obscure country will not move us, he tries what the court can do; if not our home, the tavern; if not the field, our closet. As no place is left free by his malice, so no

place must be made prejudicial by our carelessness; and as we should always watch over ourselves, so then most when the opportunity carries cause of suspicion.

Wherefore is Christ carried up so high but for prospect? If the kingdoms of the earth and their glory were only to be presented to his imagination, the valley would have served; if to the outward sense, no hill could suffice. Circular bodies, though small, cannot be seen at once. This show was made to both; divers kingdoms lying round about Judæa were represented to the eye; the glory of them to the imagination. Satan meant the eye could tempt the fancy no less than the fancy could tempt the will. How many thousand souls have died of the wound of the eye! If we do not let in sin at the window of the eye or the door of the ear, it cannot enter into our hearts.

If there be any pomp, majesty, pleasure, bravery, in the world, where should it be but in the courts of princes, whom God hath made his images, his deputies on earth? There is soft raiment, sumptuous feasts, rich jewels, honourable attendance, glorious triumphs, royal state; these Satan lays out to the fairest show. But O the craft of that old serpent! Many a care attends greatness: no crown is without thorns: high seats are never but uneasy. All those infinite discontentments which are the shadow of earthly sovereignty he hides out of the way; nothing may be seen but what may both please and allure. Satan is still and ever like himself. If temptations might be but turned about and shown on both sides, the kingdom of darkness would not be so populous. Now whensoever the tempter sets upon any poor soul, all sting of conscience, wrath, judgment, torment, is concealed, as if they were not; nothing may appear to the eye but pleasure, profit, and a seeming happiness in the enjoying our desires. Those other woful objects are reserved for the farewell of sin, that our misery may be seen and felt at once. When we are once sure, Satan is a tyrant; till then, he is a parasite. There can be no safety if we do not view as well the back as the face of temptations.

But O presumption and impudence, that hell itself may be ashamed of! The devil dares say to Christ, *All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* That beggarly spirit that hath not an inch of earth can offer the whole world to the Maker, to the Owner of it. The slave of God would be adored of his Creator. How can we hope he should be sparing

of false boasts and of unreasonable promises unto us, when he dares offer kingdoms to Him by whom kings reign?

Temptations on the right hand are most dangerous. How many that have been hardened with fear have melted with honour? There is no doubt of that soul that will not bite at the golden hook.

False liars and vainglorious boasters see the top of their pedigree, if I may not rather say that Satan doth borrow the use of their tongues for a time; whereas faithful is he that hath promised, who will also do it. Fidelity and truth is the issue of heaven.

If idolatry were not a dear sin to Satan, he would not be so importunate to compass it. It is miserable to see how he draws the world insensibly into this sin, which they profess to detest. Those that would rather hazard the furnace than worship gold in a statue, yet do adore it in the stamp, and find no fault with themselves. If our hearts be drawn to stoop unto an over-high respect of any creature, we are idolaters. O God, it is no marvel if thy jealousy be kindled at the admission of any of thine own works into a competition of honour with their Creator.

Never did our Saviour say, *Avoid, Satan,* till now. It is a just indignation that is conceived at the motion of a rivality with God. Neither yet did Christ exercise his divine power in this command, but by the necessary force of Scripture drives away that impure tempter, *It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* The rest of our Saviour's answers were more full and direct than that they could admit of a reply; but this was so flat and absolute, that it utterly daunted the courage of Satan, and put him to a shameful flight, and made him for the time weary of his trade.

The way to be rid of the troublesome solicitations of that wicked one is continued resistance. He that forcibly drove the tempter from himself takes him off from us, and will not abide his assaults perpetual. It is our exercise and trial that he intends, not our confusion.

SIMON CALLED.—Luke v.

As the sun in his first rising draws all eyes to it, so did this Sun of Righteousness when he first shone forth into the world.

His miraculous cures drew patients; his divine doctrine drew auditors: both together drew the admiring multitude by troops after him. And why do we not still follow thee, O Saviour, through deserts and mountains, over land and seas, that we may be both healed and taught? It was thy word, that when thou wert lift up thou wouldst draw all men unto thee: behold, thou art lift up long since, both to the tree of shame and to the throne of heavenly glory; *Draw us, and we shall run after thee.* Thy word is still the same, though proclaimed by men; thy virtue is still the same, though exercised upon the spirits of men. O give us to hunger after both, that by both our souls may be satisfied.

I see the people not only following Christ, but pressing upon him: even very unmannerliness finds here both excuse and acceptation. They did not keep their distances in an awe to the majesty of the Speaker, while they were ravished with the power of the speech; yet did not our Saviour check their unreverent thronging, but rather encourages their forwardness. We cannot offend thee, O God, with the importunity of our desires. It likes thee well, that the kingdom of heaven should suffer violence. Our slackness doth ever displease thee, never our vehemency.

The throng of auditors forced Christ to leave the shore and to make Peter's ship his pulpit. Never were there such nets cast out of that fisher-boat before. While he was upon the land he healed the sick bodies by his touch; now that he was upon the sea, he cured the sick souls by his doctrine; and is purposely severed from the multitude that he may unite them to him. He that made both sea and land causeth both of them to conspire to the opportunities of doing good.

Simon was busy washing his nets. Even those nets that caught nothing must be washed, no less than if they had sped well. The night's toil doth not excuse his day's work. Little did Simon think of leaving those nets which he so carefully washed; and now Christ interrupts him with the favour and blessing of his gracious presence. Labour in our calling, how homely soever, makes us capable of divine benediction.

The honest fisherman, when he saw the people flock after Christ, and heard him speak with such power, could not but conceive a general and confuse apprehension of some excellent worth in such a teacher; and therefore is glad to honour his ship with such a guest; and is first Christ's host by sea, ere he is his disciple by land. An humble and serviceable entertainment of a

prophet of God was a good foundation of his future honour. He that would so easily lend Christ his hand and his ship, was likely soon after to bestow himself upon his Saviour.

Simon hath no sooner done this service to Christ, than Christ is preparing for his reward. When the sermon is ended, the ship room shall be paid for abundantly; neither shall the host expect any other paymaster than himself; *Launch forth into the deep, and let down your nets to make a draught.* That ship, which lent Christ an opportunity of catching men upon the shore, shall be requited with a plentiful draught of fish in the deep.

It had been as easy for our Saviour to have brought the fish to Peter's ship, close to the shore; yet, as choosing rather to have the ship carried to the shoal of fish, he bids *launch forth into the deep.* In his miracles he loves ever to meet nature in her bounds; and when she hath done her best, to supply the rest by his overruling power. The same power therefore that could have caused the fishes to leap upon dry land, or to leave themselves forsaken of the waters upon the sands of the lake, will rather find them in a place natural to their abiding; *Launch out into the deep.*

Rather in a desire to gratify and obey his guest than to pleasure himself, will Simon bestow one cast of his net. Had Christ enjoined him an harder task, he had not refused, yet not without an allegation of the unlikelihood of success, *Master, we have travailed all night, and caught nothing; yet at thy word I will let down the net.* The night was the fittest time for the hopes of their trade. Not unjustly might Simon misdoubt his speed by day when he had worn out the night in unprofitable labour. Sometimes God crosseth the fairest of our expectations, and gives a blessing to those times and means whereof we despair. That pains cannot be cast away, which we resolve to lose for Christ.

O God, how many do I see casting out their nets in the great lake of the world, which in the whole night of their life have caught nothing? *They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth; and that which is trodden upon breaketh out into a serpent. Their webs shall be no garments; neither shall they cover themselves with their labours. O ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity, and follow after lies?*

Yet if we have thus vainly misspent the time of our darkness, let us, at the command of Christ, cast out our new-washen nets: our humble and penitent obedience shall come home laden with

blessings. *And when they had so done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, so that their net brake.*

What a difference there is betwixt our own voluntary acts and those that are done upon command; not more in the grounds of them than in the issue! those are ofttimes fruitless, these ever successful. Never man threw out his net at the word of his Saviour and drew it back empty. Who would not obey thee, O Christ, since thou dost so bountifully requite our weakest services!

It was not mere retribution that was intended in this event, but instruction also. This act was not without a mystery. He that should be made a fisher of men shall in this draught foresee his success. *The kingdom of heaven is like a draw-net cast into the sea, which when it is full men draw to land.* The very first draught that Peter made, after the complement of his apostleship, enclosed no less than three thousand souls. O powerful gospel, that can fetch sinful men from out of the depths of natural corruption! O happy souls, that, from the blind and muddy cells of our wicked nature, are drawn forth to the glorious liberty of the sons of God!

Simon's net breaks with the store. Abundance is sometimes no less troublesome than want. The net should have held if Christ had not meant to overcharge Simon both with blessing and admiration. How happily is that net broken whose rupture draws the fisher to Christ!

Though the net brake, yet the fish escaped not. He that brought them thither to be taken, held them there till they were taken.

They beckoned to their partners in the other ship that they should come and help them. There are other ships in partnership with Peter; he doth not fish all the lake alone. There cannot be a better improvement of society than to help us gain; to relieve us in our profitable labours; to draw up the spiritual draught into the vessel of Christ and his Church. Wherefore hath God given us partners, but that we should beckon to them for their aid in our necessary occasions?

Neither doth Simon slacken his hand because he had assistants. What shall we say to those lazy fishers who can set others to the drag, while themselves look on at ease; caring only to feed themselves with the fish, not willing to wet their hands with the net?

What shall we say to this excess of gain? The nets break, the

ships sink with their burden. O happy complaint of too large a capture! O Saviour, if those apostolical vessels of thy first rigging were thus overlaid, ours float and totter with a ballasted lightness. Thou, who art no less present in these bottoms of ours, lade them with an equal freight of converted souls, and let us praise thee for thus sinking.

Simon was a skilful fisher, and knew well the depth of his trade; and now perceiving more than art or nature in this draught, he falls down at the knees of Jesus, saying, *Lord, go from me, for I am a sinful man.* Himself is caught in this net. He doth not greedily fall upon so unexpected and profitable a booty, but he turns his eyes from the draught to himself, from the act to the Author, acknowledging vileness in the one, in the other Majesty: *Go from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*

It had been pity the honest fisherman should have been taken at his word. O Simon, thy Saviour is come into thine own ship to call thee, to call others by thee unto blessedness; and dost thou say, *Lord, go from me?* as if the patient should say to the physician, "Depart from me, for I am sick." It was the voice of astonishment, not of dislike; the voice of humility, not of discontentment: yea, because thou art a sinful man, therefore hath thy Saviour need to come to thee, to stay with thee; and because thou art humble in the acknowledgment of thy sinfulness, therefore Christ delights to abide with thee, and will call thee to abide with him. No man ever fared the worse for abasing himself to his God. Christ hath left many a soul for froward and unkind usage; never any for the disparagement of itself and entreaties of humility. Simon could not devise how to hold Christ faster than by thus suing to him to be gone, than by thus pleading his unworthiness.

O my soul, be not weary of complaining of thine own wretchedness. Disgrace thyself to him that knows thy vileness. Be astonished at those mercies which have shamed thine ill deservings. Thy Saviour hath no power to go away from a prostrate heart. He that resists the proud heartens the lowly: *Fear not, for I will make thee henceforth a fisher of men.* Lo, this humility is rewarded with an apostleship. What had the earth ever more glorious than a legacy from heaven? He that bade Christ go from him shall have the honour to go first on this happy errand. This was a trade that Simon had no skill of: it could not but be enough to him that Christ said, *I will make thee;* the

miracle showed him able to make good his word. He that hath power to command the fishes to be taken, can easily enable the hands to take them.

What is this divine trade of ours then but a spiritual piscation? the world is a sea: souls, like fishes, swim at liberty in this deep. The nets of wholesome doctrine draw up some to the shore of grace and glory. How much skill and toil and patience is requisite in this art! *Who is sufficient for these things?* This sea, these nets, the fishers, the fish, the vessels, are all thine, O God. Do what thou wilt in us and by us. Give us ability and grace to take; give men will and grace to be taken; and take thou glory by that which thou hast given.

THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.—John ii.

Was this then thy first miracle, O Saviour, that thou wroughtest in Cana of Galilee? And could there be a greater miracle than this, that, having been thirty years upon earth, thou didst no miracle till now? that thy Divinity did hide itself thus long in flesh? that so long thou wouldst lie obscure in a corner of Galilee, unknown to that world thou camest to redeem? that so long thou wouldst strain the patient expectation of those who, ever since thy star, waited upon the revelation of a Messias? We silly wretches if we have but a dram of virtue are ready to set it out to the best show; thou, who *receivedst not the Spirit by measure*, wouldst content thyself with a willing obscurity; and concealedst that power that made the world in the roof of an human breast, in a cottage of Nazareth. O Saviour, none of thy miracles is more worthy of astonishment than thy not doing of miracles.

What thou didst in private, thy wisdom thought fit for secrecy; but if thy blessed mother had not been acquainted with some domestical wonders, she had not now expected a miracle abroad. The stars are not seen by day, the sun itself is not seen by night. As it is no small art to hide art, so is it no small glory to conceal glory.

Thy first public miracle graceth a marriage. It is an ancient and laudable institution, that the rites of matrimony should not want a solemn celebration. When are feasts in season, if not at the recovery of our lost rib; if not at this main change of our estate, wherein the joy of obtaining meets with the hope of further comforts? The Son of the Virgin, and the mother of that

Son, are both at a wedding. It was in all likelihood some of their kindred to whose nuptial feast they were invited so far; yet was it more the honour of the act than of the person that Christ intended. He that made the first marriage in Paradise bestows his first miracle upon a Galilean marriage. He that was the author of matrimony and sanctified it doth, by his holy presence, honour the resemblance of his eternal union with his Church. How boldly may we spit in the faces of all the impure adversaries of wedlock, when the Son of God pleases to honour it!

The glorious Bridegroom of the Church knew well how ready men would be to place shame even in the most lawful conjunctions; and therefore his first work shall be to countenance his own ordinance. Happy is that wedding where Christ is a guest. O Saviour, those that marry in thee cannot marry without thee. There is no holy marriage whereat thou art not (however invisible, yet) truly present by thy Spirit, by thy gracious benediction. Thou makest marriages in heaven, thou blessest them from heaven. O thou that hast betrothed us to thyself in truth and righteousness do thou consummate that happy marriage of ours in the highest heavens!

It was no rich or sumptuous bridal, to which Christ with his mother and disciples vouchsafed to come from the farther parts of Galilee. I find him not at the magnificent feasts or triumphs of the great. The proud pomp of the world did not agree with the state of a servant.

This poor needy Bridegroom wants drink for his guests. The blessed Virgin, though a stranger to the house, out of a charitable compassion and a friendly desire to maintain the decency of an hospitable entertainment, inquires into the wants of her host; pities them; bemoans them where there was power of redress: *When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said unto him, They have no wine.* How well doth it beseem the eyes of piety and Christian love to look into the necessities of others! She that conceived the God of mercies both in her heart and in her womb, doth not fix her eyes upon her own teacher; but searcheth into the penury of a poor Israelite, and feels those wants whereof he complains not. They are made for themselves, whose thoughts are only taken up with their own store or indigence.

There was wine enough for a meal, though not for a feast; and if there were not wine enough, there was enough water: yet the holy Virgin complains of the want of wine, and is troubled with

the very lack of superfluity. The bounty of our God reaches not to our life only, but to our contentment: neither hath he thought good to allow us only the bread of sufficiency, but sometimes of pleasure. One while that is but necessary which some other time were superfluous. It is a scrupulous injustice to scant ourselves where God hath been liberal.

To whom should we complain of any want, but to the Maker and Giver of all things? The blessed Virgin knew to whom she sued. She had good reason to know the divine nature and power of her Son. Perhaps the bridegroom was not so needy, but if not by his purse, yet by his credit he might have supplied that want; or it were hard if some of the neighbour-guests, had they been duly solicited, might not have furnished him with so much wine as might suffice for the last service of a dinner. But blessed Mary knew a nearer way: she did not think best to lade at the shallow channel, but runs rather to the well-head where she may dip and fill the firkins at once with ease. It may be she saw that the train of Christ, which unbidden followed unto that feast and unexpectedly added to the number of the guests, might help forward that defect, and therefore she justly solicits her Son Jesus for a supply. Whether we want bread or water or wine, necessaries or comforts, whither should we run, O Saviour, but to that infinite munificence of thine which neither denieth nor upbraideth any thing? We cannot want, we cannot abound, but from thee. Give us what thou wilt, so thou give us contentment with what thou givest.

But what is this I hear? A sharp answer to the suit of a mother? *O woman, what have I to do with thee?* He whose sweet mildness and mercy never sent away any suppliant discontented, doth he only frown upon her that bare him? He that commands us to honour father and mother, doth he disdain her whose flesh he took? God forbid. Love and duty doth not exempt parents from due admonition. She solicited Christ as a mother, he answers her as a woman. If she were the mother of his flesh, his Deity was eternal. She might not so remember herself to be a mother, that she should forget she was a woman; nor so look upon him as a son, that she should not regard him as God. He was so obedient to her as a mother, that withal she must obey him as her God. That part which he took from her shall observe her; she must observe that nature which came from above, and made her both a woman and a mother. Matter of miracle concerned the

Godhead only: supernatural things were above the sphere of fleshly relation. If now the blessed Virgin will be prescribing either time or form unto divine acts, *O woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not come.* In all bodily actions his style was, *O mother;* in spiritual and heavenly, *O woman.* Neither is it for us, in the holy affairs of God, to know any faces; yea, if *we have known Christ heretofore according to the flesh, henceforth know we him so no more.*

O blessed Virgin, if in that heavenly glory wherein thou art thou canst take notice of these earthly things, with what indignation dost thou look upon the presumptuous superstition of vain men, whose suits make thee more than a solicitor of divine favours! Thy humanity is not lost in thy motherhood nor in thy glory. The respects of nature reach not so high as heaven. It is far from thee to abide that honour which is stolen from thy Redeemer.

There is a marriage whereto we are invited; yea, wherein we are already interested, not as the guests only, but as the bride, in which there shall be no want of the wine of gladness. It is marvel if in these earthly banquets there be not some lack. *In thy presence,* O Saviour, *there is fulness of joy; and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore. Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

Even in that rough answer doth the blessed Virgin descry cause of hope. If his hour were not yet come, it was therefore coming. When the expectation of the guests and the necessity of the occasion had made fit room for the miracle, it shall come forth and challenge their wonder. Faithfully therefore and observantly doth she turn her speech from her Son to the waiters; *Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.* How well doth it beseem the mother of Christ to agree with his Father in heaven, whose voice from heaven said, *This is my well-beloved Son, hear him.* She that said of herself, *Be it unto me according to thy word,* says unto others, *Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.* This is the way to have miracles wrought in us, obedience to his word.

The power of Christ did not stand upon their officiousness: he could have wrought wonders in spite of them, but their perverse refusal of his commands might have made them uncapable of the favour of a miraculous action. He that can when he will convince the obstinate, will not grace the disobedient. He that could work without us or against us, will not work for us but by us.

This very poor house was furnished with many and large vessels for outward purification: as if sin had dwelt upon the skin, that superstitious people sought holiness in frequent washings. Even this rinsing fouled them with the uncleanness of a traditional will-worship. It is the soul which needs scouring, and nothing can wash that but the blood which they desperately wished upon themselves and their children, for guilt, not for expiation. *Purge* thou us, O Lord, *with hyssop, and* we *shall be clean; wash* us, *and* we *shall be whiter than snow.*

The waiters could not but think strange of so unseasonable a command, *Fill the waterpots.* "It is wine that we want, what do we go to fetch water? Doth this holy man mean thus to quench our feast and cool our stomachs? If there be no remedy, we could have sought this supply unbidden." Yet so far hath the charge of Christ's mother prevailed, that instead of carrying flagons of wine to the table, they go to fetch pails full of water from the cisterns. It is no pleading of unlikelihoods against the command of an almighty power.

He that could have created wine immediately in those vessels will rather turn water into wine. In all the course of his miracles I do never find him making aught of nothing: all his great works are grounded upon former existencies. He multiplied the bread, he changed the water, he restored the withered limbs, he raised the dead, and still wrought upon that which was, and did not make that which was not. What doth he, in the ordinary way of nature, but turn the watery juice that arises up from the root into wine? he will only do this now suddenly and at once which he doth usually by sensible degrees. It is ever duly observed by the Son of God not to do more miracle than he needs.

How liberal are the provisions of Christ! If he had turned but one of those vessels it had been a just proof of his power, and perhaps that quantity had served the present necessity; now he furnisheth them with so much wine as would have served an hundred and fifty guests for an entire feast. Even the measure magnifies at once both his power and mercy. The munificent hand of God regards not our need only, but our honest affluence. It is our sin and our shame if we turn his favour into wantonness.

There must be first a filling ere there be a drawing out. Thus in our vessels the first care must be of our receipt, the next of our expense. God would have us cisterns, not channels.

Our Saviour would not be his own taster, but he sends the first

draught to the governor of the feast. He knew his own power, they did not: neither would he bear witness of himself, but fetch it out of others' mouths.

They that knew not the original of that wine yet praised the taste; *Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.* The same bounty that expressed itself in the quantity of the wine shows itself no less in the excellence. Nothing can fall from that divine hand not exquisite. That liberality hated to provide crab-wine for his guests. It was fit that the miraculous effects of Christ, which came from his immediate hand, should be more perfect than the natural. O blessed Saviour, how delicate is that new wine which we shall one day drink with thee in thy Father's kingdom! Thou shalt turn this water of our earthly affliction into that wine of gladness wherewith our souls shall be satiate for ever. *Make haste, O my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart, upon the mountains of spices.*

THE GOOD CENTURION.—Matthew viii, Luke vii.

Even the bloody trade of war yielded worthy clients to Christ. This Roman captain had learned to believe in that Jesus whom many Jews despised. No nation, no trade, can shut out a good heart from God. If he were a foreigner for birth, yet he was a domestic in heart. He could not change his blood; he could overrule his affections. He loved that nation which was chosen of God, and if he were not of the synagogue, yet he built a synagogue; where he might not be a party, he would be a benefactor. Next to being good is a favouring of goodness. We could not love religion if we utterly want it.

How many true Jews were not so zealous! Either will or ability lacked in them whom duty more obliged. Good affections do many times more than supply nature. Neither doth God regard whence, but what we are.

I do not see this centurion come to Christ, as the Israelitish captain came to Elias in Carmel; but with his cap in his hand, with much suit, much submission; by others, by himself. He sends first the elders of the Jews, whom he might hope that their nation and place might make gracious; then, lest the employment of others might argue neglect, he seconds them in person. Cold

and fruitless are the motions of friends where we do wilfully shut up our own lips. Importunity cannot but speed well in both. Could we but speak for ourselves as this captain did for his servant, what could we possibly want? What marvel is it if God be not forward to give where we care not to ask; or ask as if we cared not to receive?

Shall we yet call this a suit or a complaint? I hear no one word of entreaty. The less is said the more is concealed; it is enough to lay open his want. He knew well that he had to deal with so wise and merciful a Physician, as that the opening of the malady was a craving of cure. If our spiritual miseries be but confessed, they cannot fail of redress.

Great variety of suitors resorted to Christ. One comes to him for a son, another for a daughter, a third for himself; I see none come for his servant but this one centurion. Neither was he a better man than a master. His servant is sick; he doth not drive him out of doors, but lays him at home; neither doth he stand gazing by his bedside, but seeks forth; he seeks forth, not to witches or charmers, but to Christ; he seeks to Christ, not with a fashionable relation, but with a vehement aggravation of the disease. Had the master been sick, the faithfullest servant could have done no more. He is unworthy to be well served that will not sometimes wait upon his followers. Conceits of inferiority may not breed in us a neglect of charitable offices. So must we look down upon our servants here on earth as that we must still look up to our Master which is in heaven.

But why didst thou not, O centurion, rather bring thy servant to Christ for cure than sue for him absent? There was a paralytic, whom faith and charity brought to our Saviour, and let down through the uncovered roof in his bed; why was not thine so carried, so presented? Was it out of the strength of thy faith, which assured thee thou neededst not show thy servant to him that saw all things? One and the same grace may yield contrary effects. They, because they believed, brought the patient to Christ; thou broughtest not thine to him because thou believedst. Their act argued no less desire, thine more confidence. Thy labour was less because thy faith was more.

O that I could come thus to my Saviour, and make such moan to him for myself, "Lord, my soul is sick of unbelief, sick of self-love, sick of inordinate desires." I should not need to say more. Thy mercy, O Saviour, would not then stay by for my suit, but

would prevent me as here with a gracious engagement, *I will come and heal thee.*

I did not hear the centurion say either, "Come," or "Heal him;" the one he meant though he said not, the other he neither said nor meant. Christ overgives both his words and intentions. It is the manner of that divine munificence, where he meets with a faithful suitor, to give more than is requested, to give when he is not requested. The very insinuations of our necessities are no less violent than successful. We think the measure of human bounty runs over when we obtain but what we ask with importunity, that infinite goodness keeps within bounds when it overflows the desires of our hearts.

As he said, so he did. The word of Christ either is his act or concurs with it. He did not stand still when he said *I will come;* but he went as he spake. When the ruler entreated him for his son, *Come down ere he die*, our Saviour stirred not a foot: the centurion did but complain of the sickness of his servant, and Christ unasked says, *I will come and heal him.* That he might be far from so much as seeming to honour wealth and despise meanness, he that came in the shape of a servant would go down to the sick servant's pallet, would not go to the bed of the rich ruler's son. It is the basest motive of respect that ariseth merely from outward greatness. Either more grace or more need may justly challenge our favourable regards no less than private obligations.

Even so, O Saviour, that which thou offeredst to do for the centurion's servant hast thou done for us. We were sick unto death; so far had the dead palsy of sin overtaken us, that there was no life of grace left in us: when thou wert not content to sit still in heaven and say, "I will cure them," but addedst also, "I will come and cure them." Thyself came down accordingly to this miserable world, and hast personally healed us, so as now we shall not die but live, and declare thy works, O Lord. And O that we could enough praise that love and mercy which hath so graciously abased thee, and could be but so low dejected before thee as thou hast stooped low unto us; that we could be but as lowly subjects of thy goodness as we are unworthy.

O admirable return of humility! Christ will go down to visit the sick servant. The master of that servant says, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof;* the Jewish elders that went before to mediate for him could say, "He is

worthy that thou shouldest do this for him;" but the centurion, when he comes to speak for himself, *I am not worthy.* They said, he was worthy of Christ's miracle; he says, he is unworthy of Christ's presence. There is great difference betwixt others' valuations and our own. Sometimes the world underrates him that finds reason to set a high price upon himself; sometimes again it overvalues a man that knows just cause of his own humiliation. If others mistake us, this can be no warrant for our error. We cannot be wise unless we receive the knowledge of ourselves by direct beams, not by reflection; unless we have learned to contemn unjust applauses, and, scorning the flattery of the world, to frown upon our own vileness: *Lord, I am not worthy.*

Many a one if he had been in the centurion's coat would have thought well of it; a captain, a man of good ability and command, a founder of a synagogue, a patron of religion; yet he overlooks all these; and when he casts his eye upon the divine worth of Christ and his own weakness, he says, "*I am not worthy:* alas! Lord, I am a gentile, an alien, a man of blood; thou art holy, thou art omnipotent." True humility will teach us to find out the best of another and the worst piece of ourselves; pride contrarily shows us nothing but matter of admiration in ourselves, in others of contempt. While he confessed himself unworthy of any favour, he approved himself worthy of all. Had not Christ been before in his heart, he could not have thought himself unworthy to entertain that guest within his house. Under the low roof of an humble breast doth God ever delight to dwell. The state of his palace may not be measured by the height but by the depth. Brags and bold faces do ofttimes carry it away with men; nothing prevails with God but our voluntary dejections.

It is fit the foundations should be laid deep where the building is high. The centurion's humility was not more low than his faith was lofty; that reaches up into heaven, and in the face of human weakness descries Omnipotence; *Only say the word, and my servant shall be whole.*

Had the centurion's roof been heaven itself, it could not have been worthy to be come under of him whose word was almighty, and who was the Almighty Word of his Father. Such is Christ confessed by him that says, *Only say the word.* None but a Divine power is unlimited; neither hath faith any other bounds

than God himself. There needs no footing to remove mountains or devils but a word. Do but say the word, O Saviour, my sin shall be remitted, my soul shall be healed, my body shall be raised from dust, both soul and body shall be glorious.

Whereupon then was the steady confidence of the good centurion? He saw how powerful his own word was with those that were under his command, (though himself were under the command of another,) the force whereof extended even to absent performances; well therefore might he argue that a free and unbounded power might give infallible commands, and that the most obstinate disease must therefore needs yield to the beck of the God of nature. Weakness may show us what is in strength. By one drop of water we may see what is in the main ocean.

I marvel not if the centurion were kind to his servants, for they were dutiful to him. He can but say, *Do this*, and it is done. These mutual respects draw on each other. Cheerful and diligent service in the one calls for a due and favourable care in the other. They that neglect to please cannot complain to be neglected.

O that I could be but such a servant to mine heavenly Master! Alas! every of his commands says, *Do this*, and I do it not: every of his inhibitions says, *Do it not*, and I do it. He says, "Go from the world;" I run to it: he says, "Come to me;" I run from him. Woe is me! this is not service, but enmity. How can I look for favour while I return rebellion? It is a gracious Master whom we serve; there can be no duty of ours that he sees not, that he acknowledges not, that he crowns not. We could not but be happy if we could be officious.

What can be more marvellous than to see Christ marvel? All marvelling supposes an ignorance going before and a knowledge following some accident unexpected: now who wrought this faith in the centurion but he that wondered at it? He knew well what he wrought, because he wrought what he would: yet he wondered at what he both wrought and knew, to teach us, much more to admire that which he at once knows and holds admirable. He wrought this faith as God, he wondered at it as man. God wrought, and man admired. He that was both did both, to teach us where to bestow our wonder. I never find Christ wondering at gold or silver, at the costly and curious works of human skill or industry; yea, when the disciples wondered at the magnificence of the temple, he rebuked them rather. I find him not

wondering at the frame of heaven and earth, nor at the orderly disposition of all creatures and events: the familiarity of these things intercepts the admiration. But when he sees the grace or acts of faith, he so approves them that he is ravished with wonder. He that rejoiced in the view of his creation, to see that of nothing he had made all things good, rejoices no less in the reformation of his creature, to see that he had made good of evil. *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; and there is no spot in thee. My sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart, thou hast wounded my heart with one of thine eyes.*

Our wealth, beauty, wit, learning, honour, may make us accepted of men; but it is our faith only that shall make God in love with us. And why are we of any other save God's diet, to be more affected with the least measure of grace in any man than with all the outward glories of the world? There are great men whom we justly pity; we can admire none but the gracious.

Neither was that plant more worthy of wonder in itself, than that it grew in such a soil, with so little help of rain and sun. The weakness of means adds to the praise and acceptation of our proficiency. To do good upon a little is the commendation of thrift: it is small thank to be full handed in a large estate: as contrarily, the strength of means doubles the revenge of our neglect. It is not more the shame of Israel than the glory of the centurion, that our Saviour says, *I have not found so great faith in Israel.* Had Israel yielded any equal faith, it could not have been unespied of these all-seeing eyes: yet were their helps so much greater as their faith was less; and God never gives more than he requires. Where we have laid our tillage and compost and seed, who would not look for a crop? but if the uncultured fallow yield more, how justly is that unanswerable ground near to a curse!

Our Saviour did not mutter this censorious testimony to himself, nor whisper it to his disciples; but he turned him about to the people, and spake it in their ears, that he might at once work their shame and emulation. In all other things, except spiritual, our self-love makes us impatient of equals, much less can we endure to be outstripped by those who are our professed inferiors. It is well if any thing can kindle in us holy ambitions. Dull and base are the spirits of that man that can abide to see another overtake him in the way, and outrun him to heaven.

He that both wrought this faith and wondered at it doth now reward it; *Go thy ways; and as thou hast believed, so be it unto thee.* Never was any faith unseen of Christ; never was any seen without allowance; never was any allowed without remuneration. The measure of our receipts in the matter of favour is the proportion of our belief. The infinite mercy of God, which is ever like itself, follows but one rule in his gift to us, the faith that he gives us. Give us, O God, to believe, and be it to us as thou wilt: it shall be to us above that we will.

The centurion sues for his servant, and Christ says, *So be it unto thee.* The servant's health is the benefit of the master, and the master's faith is the health of the servant. And if the prayers of an earthly master prevailed so much with the Son of God for the recovery of a servant, how shall the intercession of the Son of God prevail with his Father in heaven for us, that are his impotent children and servants upon earth! What can we want, O Saviour, while thou suest for us? He that hath given thee for us can deny thee nothing for us, can deny us nothing for thee. In thee we are happy, and shall be glorious. To thee, O thou mighty Redeemer of Israel, with thine eternal Father, together with thy blessed Spirit, one God, infinite and incomprehensible, be given all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK III.

TO MY RIGHT WORTHY AND WORSHIPFUL FRIEND, MASTER

JOHN GIFFORD,

OF LANCRASSE, IN DEVON, ESQ.

ALL GRACE AND PEACE.

Sir,—I hold it, as I ought, one of the rich mercies of God, that he hath given me favour in some eyes which have not seen me; but none, that I know, hath so much demerited me unknown, as your worthy family. Ere therefore you see my face, see my hand willingly professing my thankful obligations. Wherewith may it please you to accept of this parcel of thoughts; not unlike those fellows of theirs, whom you have entertained above their desert. These shall present unto you our bountiful Saviour, magnifying his mercies to men in a sweet variety; healing the diseased, raising the dead, casting out the devil, calling in the publican; and shall raise your heart to adore that infinite goodness. Every help to our devotion deserves to be precious; so much more, as the decrepit age of the world declines to an heartless coldness of piety. That God, to whose honour these poor labours are meant, bless them in your hands; and from them to all readers. To his protection I heartily commend you, and the right virtuous gentlewoman, your worthy wife, with all the pledges of your happy affection, as whom you have deserved to be

Your truly thankful and officious friend,

JOS. HALL.

THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED.—Luke vii.

THE favours of our beneficent Saviour were, at the least, contiguous. No sooner hath he raised the centurion's servant from his bed, than he raises the widow's son from his bier.

The fruitful clouds are not ordained to fall all in one field. Nain must partake of the bounty of Christ as well as Cana or Capernaum: and if this sun were fixed in one orb, yet it diffuseth heat and light to all the world. It is not for any place to engross the messengers of the Gospel, whose errand is universal. This immortal seed may not fall all in one furrow.

The little city of Nain stood under the hill of Hermon, near

unto Tabor; but now it is watered with better dews from above, the doctrine and miracles of a Saviour.

Not for state, but for the more evidence of the work, is our Saviour attended with a large train; so entering into the gate of that walled city, as if he meant to besiege their faith by his power, and to take it.

His providence hath so contrived his journey, that he meets with the sad pomp of a funeral: a woful widow, attended with her weeping neighbours, is following her only son to the grave.

There was nothing in this spectacle that did not command compassion.

A young man in the flower, in the strength of his age, swallowed up by death. Our decrepit age both expects death and solicits it; but vigorous youth looks strangely upon that grim serjeant of God. Those mellow apples that fall alone from the tree we gather up with contentment; we chide to have the unripe unseasonably beaten down with cudgels.

But more: a young man, the only son, the only child of his mother. No condition can make it other than grievous for a well-natured mother to part with her own bowels, yet surely store is some mitigation of loss. Amongst many children, one may be more easily missed; for still we hope the surviving may supply the comforts of the dead: but when all our hopes and joys must either live or die in one, the loss of that one admits of no consolation. When God would describe the most passionate expression of sorrow that can fall into the miserable, he can but say, *O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in the ashes; make lamentation and bitter mourning, as for thine only son.* Such was the loss, such was the sorrow of this disconsolate mother. Neither words nor tears can suffice to discover it.

Yet more: had she been aided by the counsel and supportation of a loving yokefellow, this burden might have seemed less intolerable. A good husband may make amends for the loss of a son. Had the root been left to her entire, she might better have spared the branch: now both are cut up, all the stay of her life is gone; and she seems abandoned to a perfect misery.

And now, when she gave herself up for a forlorn mourner, past all capacity of redress, the God of comfort meets her, pities her, relieves her. Here was no solicitor but his own compassion. In other occasions he was sought and sued to: the centurion

comes to him for a servant; the ruler for a son; Jairus for a daughter; the neighbours for the paralytic: here he seeks up the patient, and offers the cure unrequested. While we have to do with the Father of mercies our afflictions are the most powerful suitors. No tears, no prayers can move him so much as his own commiseration. O God, none of our secret sorrows can be either hid from thine eyes or kept from thine heart; and when we are past all our hopes, all possibilities of help, then art thou nearest to us for deliverance.

Here was a conspiration of all parts to mercy. The heart had compassion; the mouth said, *Weep not;* the feet went to the bier; the hand touched the coffin; the power of the Deity raised the dead. What the heart felt was secret to itself; the tongue therefore expresses it in words of comfort, *Weep not.* Alas! what are words to so strong and just passions? To bid her not to weep, that had lost her only son, was to persuade her to be miserable, and not feel it; to feel, and not regard it; to regard, and yet to smother it. Concealment doth not remedy, but aggravate sorrow. That with the counsel of not weeping therefore she might see cause of not weeping, his hand seconds his tongue. He arrests the coffin and frees the prisoner; *Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.* The Lord of life and death speaks with command. No finite power could have said so without presumption or with success. That is the voice that shall one day call up our vanished bodies from those elements into which they are resolved, and raise them out of their dust. Neither sea, nor death, nor hell can offer to detain their dead when he charges them to be delivered. Incredulous nature! What, dost thou shrink at the possibility of a resurrection when the God of nature undertakes it? It is no more hard for that Almighty Word which gave being unto all things to say "Let them be repaired," than "Let them be made."

I do not see our Saviour stretching himself upon the dead corpse, as Elias and Elisha upon the sons of the Shunamite and Sareptan; nor kneeling down and praying by the bier, as Peter did to Dorcas: but I hear him so speaking to the dead as if he were alive; and so speaking to the dead that by the word he makes him alive, *I say unto thee, Arise.*

Death hath no power to bid that man lie still whom the Son of God bids *arise.* Immediately, *he that was dead sat up.* So at the sound of the last trumpet, by the power of the same voice,

we shall arise out of the dust and stand up glorious: *This mortal shall put on immortality; this corruptible, incorruption.* This body shall not be buried, but sown; and, at our day, shall therefore spring up with a plentiful increase of glory. How comfortless, how desperate should be our lying down, if it were not for this assurance of rising! And now, behold, lest our weak faith should stagger at the ascent to so great a difficulty, he hath already by what he hath done given us tastes of what he will do. The power that can raise one man can raise a thousand, a million, a world: no power can raise one man but that which is infinite; and that which is infinite admits of no limitation.

Under the old testament, God raised one by Elias, another by Elisha living, a third by Elisha dead: by the hand of the Mediator of the new testament, he raised here the son of the widow, the daughter of Jairus, Lazarus; and in attendance of his own resurrection, he made a gaol-delivery of holy prisoners at Jerusalem. He raises the daughter of Jairus from her bed, this widow's son from his coffin, Lazarus from his grave, the dead saints of Jerusalem from their rottenness; that it might appear no degree of death can hinder the efficacy of his overruling command. He that keeps the keys of death cannot only make way for himself through the common hall and outer rooms, but through the inwardest and most reserved closets of darkness.

Methinks I see this young man, who was thus miraculously awaked from his deadly sleep, wiping and rubbing those eyes that had been shut up in death; and, descending from the bier, wrapping his winding-sheet about his loins, cast himself down in a passionate thankfulness at the feet of his almighty Restorer; adoring that Divine power which had commanded his soul back again to her forsaken lodging: and though I hear not what he said, yet I dare say they were words of praise and wonder which his returned soul first uttered.

It was the mother whom our Saviour pitied in this act, not the son; who, now forced from his quiet rest, must twice pass through the gates of death. As for her sake therefore he was raised, so to her hands was he delivered; that she might acknowledge that soul given to her, not to the possessor. Who cannot feel the amazement and ecstasy of joy that was in this revived mother when her son now salutes her from out of another world, and both receives and gives gratulations of his new life?

How suddenly were all the tears of that mournful train dried

up with a joyful astonishment! how soon is that funeral banquet turned into a new birthday feast! what striving was here to salute the late carcass of their returned neighbour! what awful and admiring looks were cast upon that Lord of life, who, seeming homely, was approved omnipotent! how gladly did every tongue celebrate both the work and the Author! *A great prophet is raised up amongst us, and God hath visited his people.* A *prophet* was the highest name they could find for him whom they saw like themselves in shape, above themselves in power. They were not yet acquainted with God manifested in the flesh. This miracle might well have assured them of more than a prophet; but he that raised the dead man from the bier would not suddenly raise these dead hearts from the grave of infidelity. They shall see reason enough to know that the prophet who was raised up to them was the God that now visited them; and at last should do as much for them as he had done for the young man, raise them from death to life, from dust to glory.

THE RULER'S SON CURED.—John iv.

The bounty of God so exceedeth man's that there is a contrariety in the exercise of it. We shut our hands because we opened them; God therefore opens his because he hath opened them. God's mercies are as comfortable in their issue as in themselves.

Seldom ever do blessings go alone. Where our Saviour supplied the bridegroom's wine, there he heals the ruler's son. He had not in all these coasts of Galilee done any miracle but here. *To him that hath shall be given.*

We do not find Christ oft attended with nobility: here he is. It was some great peer or some noted courtier that was now a suitor to him for his dying son. Earthly greatness is no defence against afflictions. We men forbear the mighty; disease and death know no faces of lords or monarchs. Could these be bribed, they would be too rich. Why should we grudge not to be privileged, when we see there is no spare of the greatest?

This noble ruler listens after Christ's return into Galilee. The most eminent amongst men will be glad to hearken after Christ in their necessity. Happy was it for him that his son was sick; he had not else been acquainted with his Saviour; his soul had continued sick of ignorance and unbelief. Why else doth our

good God send us pain, losses, opposition, but that he may be sought to? Are we afflicted? whither should we go but to Cana to seek Christ? whither but to the Cana of heaven, where our water of sorrow is turned to the wine of gladness; to that omnipotent Physician who healeth all our infirmities; that we may once say, *It is good for me that I was afflicted.*

It was about a day's journey from Capernaum to Cana. Thence hither did this courtier come for the cure of his son's fever. What pains even the greatest can be content to take for bodily health! No way is long, no labour tedious, to the desirous. Our souls are sick of a spiritual fever, labouring under the cold fit of infidelity and the hot fit of self-love, and we sit still at home, and see them languish unto death.

This ruler was neither faithless nor faithful. Had he been quite faithless, he had not taken such pains to come to Christ; had he been faithful, he had not made this suit to Christ when he was come: *Come down and heal my son, ere he die.*

Come down? as if Christ could not have cured him absent: *Ere he die?* as if that power could not have raised him being dead.

How much difference was here betwixt the centurion and the ruler! that came for his servant; this for his son. This son was not more above the servant than the faith which sued for the servant surpassed that which sued for the son. The one can say, *Master, come not under my roof, for I am not worthy; only speak the word, and my servant shall be whole:* the other can say, "Master, either come under my roof or my son cannot be whole." *Heal my son,* had been a good suit; for Christ is the only Physician for all diseases; but, *Come down and heal him,* was to teach God how to work.

It is good reason that he should challenge the right of prescribing to us, who are every way his own: it is presumption in us to stint him unto our forms. An expert workman cannot abide to be taught by a novice; how much less shall the allwise God endure to be directed by his creature! This is more than if the patient should take upon him to give a recipe to the physician. That God would give us grace, is a beseeming suit; but to say, "Give it me by prosperity," is a saucy motion.

As there is faithfulness in desiring the end, so modesty and patience in referring the means to the author. In spiritual things God hath acquainted us with the means whereby he will work,

even his own sacred ordinances. Upon these, because they have his own promise, we may call absolutely for a blessing: in all others there is no reason that beggars should be choosers. He who doth whatsoever he will must do it how he will. It is for us to receive, not to appoint.

He who came to complain of his son's sickness hears of his own; *Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.* This nobleman was, as is like, of Capernaum. There had Christ often preached; there was one of his chief residences. Either this man had heard our Saviour oft, or might have done: yet because Christ's miracles came to him only by hearsay, for as yet we find none at all wrought where he preached most, therefore the man believes not enough; but so speaks to Christ as to some ordinary physician, *Come down and heal.*

It was the common disease of the Jews, incredulity: which no receipt could heal but wonders. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeks signs.* Had they not been wilfully graceless, there was already proof enough of the Messias: the miraculous conception and life of the forerunner, Zachary's dumbness, the attestation of angels, the apparition of the star, the journey of the sages, the vision of the shepherds, the testimonies of Anna and Simeon, the prophecies fulfilled, the voice from heaven at his baptism, the divine words that he spake; and yet they must have all made up with miracles; which though he be not unwilling to give at his own times, yet he thinks much to be tied unto theirs. Not to believe without signs was a sign of stubborn hearts.

It was a foul fault and a dangerous one, *Ye will not believe.* What is it that shall condemn the world but unbelief? what can condemn us without it? No sin can condemn the repentant. Repentance is a fruit of faith: where true faith is, then, there can be no condemnation, as there can be nothing but condemnation without it. How much more foul in a noble Capernaite that had heard the sermons of so divine a Teacher! The greater light we have, the more shame it is for us to stumble. O what shall become of us that reel and fall in the clearest sunshine that ever looked forth upon any church? Be merciful to our sins, O God; and say any thing of us rather than, *Ye will not believe.*

Our Saviour tells him of his unbelief. He feels not himself sick of that disease. All his mind is on his dying son. As easily do we complain of bodily griefs as we are hardly affected with spiritual.

O the meekness and mercy of this Lamb of God! When we would have looked that he should have punished this suitor for not believing, he condescends to him, that he may believe: *Go thy way, thy son liveth.* If we should measure our hopes by our own worthiness, there were no expectation of blessings; but if we shall measure them by his bounty and compassion, there can be no doubt of prevailing. As some tender mother, that gives the breast to her unquiet child instead of the rod, so deals he with our perversenesses.

How God differences men according to no other conditions than of their faith! The centurion's servant was sick; the ruler's son. The centurion doth not sue unto Christ to come; only says, *My servant is sick of a palsy:* Christ answers him, *I will come and heal him.* The ruler sues unto Christ that he would come and heal his son: Christ will not go; only says, *Go thy way, thy son lives.* Outward things carry no respect with God. The image of that Divine Majesty shining inwardly in the graces of the soul is that which wins love from him in the meanest estate. The centurion's faith therefore could do more than the ruler's greatness; and that faithful man's servant hath more regard than this great man's son.

The ruler's request was, *Come and heal:* Christ's answer was, *Go thy way, thy son lives.* Our merciful Saviour meets those in the end whom he crosses in the way. How sweetly doth he correct our prayers, and while he doth not give us what we ask gives us better than we asked!

Justly doth he forbear to go down with this ruler, lest he should confirm him in an opinion of measuring his power by conceits of locality and distance; but he doth that in absence for which his presence was required with a repulse, *Thy son liveth;* giving a greater demonstration of his omnipotency than was craved.

How oft doth he not hear to our will that he may hear us to our advantage! The chosen vessel would be rid of temptations, he hears of a supply of grace: the sick man asks release, receives patience; life, and receives glory. Let us ask what we think best; let him give what he knows best.

With one word doth Christ heal two patients, the son and the father; the son's fever, the father's unbelief. That operative word of our Saviour was not without the intention of a trial. Had not the ruler gone home satisfied with that intimation of

his son's life and recovery neither of them had been blessed with success. Now the news of performance meets him one half of the way; and he that believed somewhat ere he came, and more when he went, grew to more faith in the way; and when he came home enlarged his faith to all the skirts of his family. A weak faith may be true; but a true faith is growing. He that boasts of a full stature in the first moment of his ascent may presume, but doth not believe.

Great men cannot want clients. Their example sways some, their authority more. They cannot go to either of the other worlds alone.

In vain do they pretend power over others who labour not to draw their families unto God.

THE DUMB DEVIL EJECTED.—Luke viii.

That the Prince of our peace might approve his victories perfect, wheresoever he met with the prince of darkness he foiled him, he ejected him. He found him in heaven; thence did he throw him headlong, and verified his prophet, *I have cast thee out of mine holy mountain.* And if the devils left their first habitation, it was because being devils they could not keep it. Their estate indeed they might have kept, and did not; their habitation they would have kept, and might not. *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!* He found him in the heart of man; for in that closet of God did the evil spirit, after his exile from heaven, shroud himself: sin gave him possession, which he kept with a willing violence: thence he casts him by his word and Spirit. He found him tyrannizing in the bodies of some possessed men, and with power commands the unclean spirits to depart.

This act is for no hand but his. When a strong man keeps possession, none but a stronger can remove him. In voluntary things, the strongest may yield to the weakest, Samson to a Delilah; but in violent ever the mightiest carries it. A spiritual nature must needs be in rank above a bodily: neither can any power be above a spirit but the God of spirits.

No otherwise is it in the mental possession. Wherever sin is, there Satan is; as, on the contrary, *Whosoever is born of God,*

the seed of God remains in him. That evil one not only is, but rules in the sons of disobedience. In vain shall we try to eject him but by the divine power of the Redeemer: *For this cause the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Do we find ourselves haunted with the familiar devils of pride, self-love, sensual desires, unbelief? None but thou, O Son of the ever-living God, can free our bosoms of these hellish guests. *O cleanse thou me from my secret sins; and keep me, that presumptuous sins prevail not over me.* O Saviour, it is no paradox to say that thou castest out more devils now than thou didst while thou wert upon earth. It was thy word, *When I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.* Satan weighs down at the feet; thou pullest at the head, yea at the heart. In every conversion which thou workest there is a dispossession. Convert me, O Lord, and I shall be converted. I know thy means are now no other than ordinary. If we expect to be dispossessed by miracle, it would be a miracle if ever we were dispossessed. O let thy gospel have the perfect work in me, so only shall I be delivered from the powers of darkness.

Nothing can be said to be dumb but what naturally speaks; nothing can speak naturally but what hath the instruments of speech; which because spirits want, they can no otherwise speak vocally than as they take voices to themselves in taking bodies. This devil was not therefore dumb in his nature, but in his effect. The man was dumb by the operation of that devil which possessed him; and now the action is attributed to the spirit which was subjectively in the man. *It is not you that speak,* saith our Saviour, *but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.*

As it is in bodily diseases, that they do not infect us alike; some seize upon the humours, others upon the spirits; some assault the brain, others the heart or lungs: so in bodily and spiritual possessions; in some the evil spirit takes away their senses, in some their limbs, in some their inward faculties; like as spiritually they affect to move us unto several sins, one to lust, another to covetousness or ambition, another to cruelty: and their names have distinguished them according to these various effects. This was a dumb devil: which yet had possessed not the tongue only of this man, but his ear; not that only, but, as it seems, his eyes too.

O subtle and tyrannous spirit, that obstructs all ways to the soul: that keeps out all means of grace both from the door and windows

of the heart; yea that stops up all passages, whether of ingress or egress; of ingress at the eye or ear, of egress at the mouth, that there might be no capacity of redress!

What holy use is there of our tongue, but to praise our Maker; to confess our sins; to inform our brethren? How rife is this dumb devil everywhere, while he stops the mouths of Christians from these useful and necessary duties!

For what end hath man those two privileges above his fellow-creatures, reason and speech, but that, as by the one he may conceive of the great works of his Maker, which the rest cannot, so by the other he may express what he conceives, to the honour of the Creator both of them and himself? And why are all other creatures said to praise God, and bidden to praise him, but because they do it by the apprehension, by the expression of man? If *the heavens declare the glory of God*, how do they it but to the eyes and by the tongue of that man for whom they were made? It is no small honour whereof the envious spirit shall rob his Maker if he can close up the mouth of his only rational and vocal creature, and turn the best of his workmanship into a dumb idol that hath a mouth and speaks not: *O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

Praise is not more necessary than complaint; praise of God than complaint of ourselves, whether to God or men. The only amends we can make to God when we have not had the grace to avoid sin, is, to confess the sin we have not avoided. This is the sponge that wipes out all the blots and blurs of our lives: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

That cunning manslayer knows there is no way to purge the sick soul but upward, by casting out the vicious humour wherewith it is clogged; and therefore holds the lips close, that the heart may not disburden itself by so wholesome evacuation. *When I kept silence, my bones consumed: for day and night thy hand, O Lord, was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. O let me confess against myself my wickedness unto thee, that thou mayest forgive the punishment of my sin.*

We have a tongue for God when we praise him; for ourselves when we pray and confess; for our brethren, when we speak the truth for their information; which if we hold back in unrighteousness, we yield unto that dumb devil.

Where do we not see that accursed spirit? He is on the bench when the mute or partial judge speaks not for truth and innocence: he is in the pulpit when the prophets of God smother, or halve, or adulterate the message of their Master: he is at the bar when irreligious jurors dare lend an oath to fear, to hope, to gain: he is in the market when godless chapmen for their penny sell the truth and their soul: he is in the common conversation of men when the tongue belies the heart, flatters the guilty, balketh reproofs even in the foulest crimes. O thou, who only art stronger than that strong one, cast him out of the hearts and mouths of men. *It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have destroyed thy law.*

That it might well appear this impediment was not natural, so soon as the man is freed from the spirit, his tongue is free to his speech. The effects of spirits, as they are wrought, so they cease at once. If the Son of God do but remove our spiritual possession we shall presently break forth into the praise of God, into the confession of our vileness, into the profession of truth.

But what strange variety do I see in the spectators of his miracle! some wondering, others censuring, a third sort tempting, a fourth applauding. There was never man or action but was subject to variety of constructions. What man could be so holy as he that was God? what act could be more worthy than the dispossession of an evil spirit? Yet this man, this act passeth these differences of interpretation.

What can we do to undergo but one opinion? If we give alms and fast, some will magnify our charity and devotion; others will tax our hypocrisy: if we give not, some will condemn our hard-heartedness; others will allow our care of justice. If we preach plainly, to some it will savour of a careless slubbering, to others of a mortified sincerity; elaborately, some will tax our affectation, others will applaud our diligence in dressing the delicate viands of God. What marvel is it if it be thus with our imperfection when it fared not otherwise with him that was purity and righteousness itself? The austere forerunner of Christ *came neither eating nor drinking;* they say, *He hath a devil:* the *Son of man came eating and drinking;* they say, *This man is a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners:* and here one of his holy acts carries away at once wonder, censure, doubt, celebration. There is no way safe for a man but to square his actions by the right rule of justice, of charity; and then let the world

have leave to spend their glosses at pleasure. It was an heroical resolution of the chosen vessel, *I pass very little to be judged of you, or of man's day.*

I marvel not if the people marvelled, for here were four wonders in one: the blind saw, the deaf heard, the dumb spake, the demoniac is delivered. Wonder was due to so rare and powerful a work, and if not this, nothing. We can cast away admiration upon the poor devices or activities of men; how much more upon the extraordinary works of Omnipotency! Whoso knows the frame of heaven and earth shall not much be affected with the imperfect effects of frail humanity; but shall with no less ravishment of soul acknowledge the miraculous works of the same Almighty hand.

Neither is the spiritual ejection worthy of any meaner entertainment. Rarity and difficulty are wont to cause wonder. There are many things which have wonder in their worth, and lose it in their frequence; there are some which have it in their strangeness, and lose it in their facility; both meet in this. To see men haunted, yea possessed with a dumb devil, is so frequent, that it is a just wonder to find a man free; but to find the dumb spirit cast out of a man, and to hear him praising God, confessing his sins, teaching others the sweet experiments of mercy, deserves just admiration. If the cynic sought in the market for a man amongst men, well may we seek amongst men for a convert. Neither is the difficulty less than the rareness. The strong man hath the possession; all passages are blocked up, all helps barred by the treachery of our nature. If any soul be rescued from these spiritual wickednesses, it is the praise of him that doth wonders alone.

But whom do I see wondering? The multitude. The unlearned beholders follow that act with wonder which the learned scribes entertain with obloquy. God hath revealed those things to babes which he hath hid from the wise and prudent. With what scorn did those great rabbins speak of these sons of the earth; *This people, that knows not the law, is accursed!* Yet the mercy of God makes an advantage of their simplicity, in that they are therefore less subject to cavillation and incredulity; as contrarily his justice causes the proud knowledge of others to lie as a block in their way to the ready assent unto the divine power of the Messias. Let the pride of glorious adversaries disdain the poverty of the clients of the gospel: it shall not repent us to go to

heaven with the vulgar, while their great ones go in state to perdition.

The multitude wondered. Who censured but scribes, great doctors of the law, of the divinity of the Jews? What scribes but those of Jerusalem, the most eminent academy of Judea? These were the men who, out of their deep reputed judgment, cast these foul aspersions upon Christ. Great wits ofttimes mislead both the owners and followers. How many shall once wish they had been born dullards, yea idiots, when they shall find their wit to have barred them out of heaven! *Where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made the wisdom of the world foolishness?* Say the world what it will, a dram of holiness is worth a pound of wit. Let others censure with the scribes, let me wonder with the multitude.

What could malice say worse? *He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of devils.* The Jews well knew that the gods of the heathen were no other than devils; amongst whom, for that the *lord of flies* (so called whether for the concourse of flies to the abundance of his sacrifices, or for his aid implored against the infestation of those swarms) was held the chief, therefore they style him *the prince of devils.* There is a subordination of spirits, some higher in degree, some inferior to others. Our Saviour himself tells us of the devil and his angels. Messengers are inferior to those that send them. The seven devils that entered into the swept and garnished house were worse than the former. Neither can principalities, and powers, and governors, and princes of the darkness of this world, design other than several ranks of evil angels. There can be no being without some kind of order, there can be no order in parity. If we look up into heaven, there is *the King of gods, the Lord of lords;* higher than the highest: if to the earth, there are monarchs, kings, princes, peers, people. If we look down to hell, there is *the prince of devils.* They labour for confusion that call for parity. What should the Church do with such a form as is not exemplified in heaven, in earth, in hell?

One devil, according to their supposition, may be used to cast out another: how far the command of one spirit over another may extend, it is a secret of infernal state too deep for the inquiry of men. The thing itself is apparent: upon compact and precontracted composition one gives way to other for the common ad-

vantage. As we see in the commonwealth of cheaters and cut-purses, one doth the fact, another is feed to bring it out, and to procure restitution: both are of the trade, both conspire to the fraud; the actor falls not out with the revealer, but divides with him that cunning spoil.

One malicious miscreant sets the devil on work to the inflicting of disease or death; another, upon agreement, for a further spiritual gain, takes him off: there is a devil in both. And if there seem more bodily favour, there is no less spiritual danger in the latter: in the one Satan wins the agent, the suitor in the other. It will be no cause of discord in hell, that one devil gives ease to the body which another tormented, that both may triumph in the gain of a soul.

O God, that any creature which bears thine image should not abhor to be beholden to the powers of hell for aid, for advice! *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that men go to inquire of the god of Ekron?* Can men be so sottish to think that the vowed enemy of their souls can offer them a bait without an hook? *What evil is there in the city which the Lord hath not done?* what is there which he cannot as easily redress? He wounds, he heals again: and if he will not, *It is the Lord, let him do what seems good in his eyes.* If he do not deliver us, he will crown our faithfulness in a patient perseverance. The wounds of God are better than the salves of Satan.

Was it possible that the wit of envy could devise so high a slander? Beelzebub was a god of the heathen, therefore herein they accuse him for an idolater: Beelzebub was a devil to the Jews, therefore they accuse him for a conjuror: Beelzebub was the chief of devils, therefore they accuse him for an arch-exorcist, for the worst kind of magician. Some professors of this black art, though their work be devilish, yet they pretend to do it in the name of Jesus; and will presumptuously seem to do that by command which is secretly transacted by agreement. The scribes accuse Christ of a direct compact with the devil, and suppose both a league and familiarity; which by the law of Moses, in the very hand of a Saul, was no other than deadly. Yea, so deep doth this wound reach, that our Saviour searching it to the bottom finds no less in it than the sin against the Holy Ghost; inferring hereupon that dreadful sentence of the irremissibleness of that sin unto death. And if this horrible crimination were cast upon thee, O Saviour, in whom the prince of this world found nothing, what

wonder is it if we, thy sinful servants, be branded on all sides with evil tongues?

Yea, which is yet more, how plain is it that these men forced their tongue to speak this slander against their own heart! Else this blasphemy had been only against the Son of man, not against the Holy Ghost; but now that the Searcher of hearts finds it to be no less than against the blessed Spirit of God, the spite must needs be obstinate; their malice doth wilfully cross their conscience. Envy never regards how true, but how mischievous: so it may gall or kill, it cares little whether with truth or falsehood. For us, *Blessed are we when men revile us, and say all manner of evil of us, for the name of Christ.* For them, *What reward shall be given to thee, thou false tongue? Even sharp arrows, with hot burning coals;* yea those very coals of hell from which thou wert enkindled.

There was yet a third sort that went a midway betwixt wonder and censure. These were not so malicious as to impute the miracle to a satanical operation. They confess it good, but not enough; and therefore urge Christ to a further proof: "Though thou hast cast out this dumb devil, yet this is no sufficient argument of thy divine power. We have yet seen nothing from thee like those ancient miracles of the times of our forefathers. Joshua caused the sun to stand still; Elijah brought fire down from heaven; Samuel astonished the people with thunder and rain in the midst of harvest: if thou wouldst command our belief, do somewhat like to these. The casting out of a devil shows thee to have some power over hell; show us now that thou hast no less power over heaven."

There is a kind of unreasonableness of desire and insatiableness in infidelity; it never knows when it hath evidence enough. This, which the Jews overlooked, was a more irrefragable demonstration of divinity than that which they desired. A devil was more than a meteor, or a parcel of an element; to cast out a devil by command, more than to command fire from heaven. Infidelity ever loves to be her own carver.

No son can be more like a father than these Jews to their progenitors in the desert. That there might be no fear of degenerating into good, they also of old tempted God in the wilderness. First, they are weary of the Egyptian bondage, and are ready to fall out with God and Moses for their stay in those furnaces. By ten miraculous plagues they are freed; and, going out of those

confines, the Egyptians follow them; the sea is before them, now they are more afflicted with their liberty than their servitude: the sea yields way, the Egyptians are drowned. And now that they are safe on the other shore, they tempt the providence of God for water; the rock yields it them: then, no less for bread and meat; God sends them manna and quails; they cry out of the food of angels. Their present enemies in the way are vanquished, they whine at the men of measures in the heart of Canaan. Nothing from God but mercy; nothing from them but temptations.

Their true brood, both in nature and in sin, had abundant proofs of the Messiah, if curing the blind, lame, diseased, deaf, dumb, ejecting devils, overruling the elements, raising the dead, could have been sufficient; yet still they must have a sign from heaven, and shut up in the style of the tempter, *If thou be the Christ.*

The gracious heart is credulous; even where it sees not it believes, and where it sees but a little it believes a great deal. Neither doth it presume to prescribe unto God what and how he shall work, but takes what it finds, and unmovably rests in what it takes. Any miracle, no miracle, serves enough for their assent who have built their faith upon the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

MATTHEW CALLED.—Matthew ix.

The number of the apostles was not yet full. One room is left void for a future occupant. Who can but expect that it is reserved for some eminent person? and behold, Matthew the publican is the man!

O the strange election of Christ! Those other disciples whose calling is recorded were from the fisher-boat; this from the toll-booth: they were unlettered; this infamous. The condition was not in itself sinful, but as the taxes which the Romans imposed on God's free people were odious, so the collectors, the farmers of them, abominable. Besides that it was hard to hold that seat without oppression, without exaction. One that best knew it branded it with polling and sycophancy. And now, behold a griping publican called to the family, to the apostleship, to the secretaryship of God. Who can despair in the conscience of his unworthiness, when he sees this pattern of the free bounty of Him

that calleth us? Merits do not carry it in the gracious election of God, but his mere favour.

There sat Matthew the publican, busy in his counting-house, reckoning up the sums of his rentals, taking up his arrearages, and wrangling for denied duties; and did so little think of a Saviour, that he did not so much as look at his passage: but *Jesus, as he passed by, saw a man sitting at the receipt of custom, named Matthew.*

As if this prospect had been sudden and casual, *Jesus saw him in passing by.* O Saviour, before the world was, thou sawest that man sitting there, thou sawest thine own passage; thou sawest his call in thy passage; and now thou goest purposely that way, that thou mightest see and call. Nothing can be hid from that piercing eye, one glance whereof hath discerned a disciple in the clothes of a publican. That habit, that shop of extortion cannot conceal from thee a vessel of election. In all forms thou knowest thine own, and in thine own time shalt fetch them out of the disguises of their foul sins or unfit conditions. What sawest thou, O Saviour, in that publican, that might either allure thine eye or not offend it? What but an hateful trade, an evil eye, a gripple hand, bloody tables, heaps of spoil? Yet now thou saidst, *Follow me.* Thou that saidst once to Jerusalem, *Thy birth and nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, thy mother an Hittite: thy navel was not cut, neither wert thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, thou wast not swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, but thou wast cast out in the open fields, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live:* now also, when thou passedst by and sawest *Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom,* saidst to him, *Follow me.* The life of this publican was so much worse than the birth of that forlorn Amorite, as *Follow me* was more than *Live.* What canst thou see in us, O God, but ugly deformities, horrible sins, despicable miseries? yet doth it please thy mercy to say unto us both *Live* and *Follow me.*

The just man is the first accuser of himself. Whom do we hear to blazon the shame of Matthew but his own mouth? Matthew the evangelist tells us of Matthew the publican. His fellows call him *Levi,* as willing to lay their finger upon the spot of his unpleasing profession; himself will not smother nor blanch it a whit,

but publishes it to all the world in a thankful recognition of the mercy that called him, as liking well that his baseness should serve for a fit foil to set off the glorious lustre of his grace by whom he was elected. What matters it how vile we are, O God, so thy glory may arise in our abasement?

That word was enough, *Follow me*, spoken by the same tongue that said to the corpse at Nain, *Young man, I say to thee, Arise.* He that said at first, *Let there be light*, says now, *Follow me.* That power sweetly inclines which could forcibly command; the force is not more unresistible than the inclination. When the sun shines upon the icicles, can they choose but melt and fall? when it looks into a dungeon, can the place choose but be enlightened? Do we see the jet drawing up straws to it, the loadstone iron, and do we marvel if the Omnipotent Saviour, by the influence of his grace, attract the heart of a publican? *He arose, and followed him.* We are all naturally averse from thee, O God; do thou but bid us *follow thee*, draw us by thy powerful word, and we shall run after thee. Alas! thou speakest, and we sit still; thou speakest by thine outward word to our ear, and we stir not. Speak thou by the secret and effectual word of thy Spirit to our heart; the world cannot hold us down; Satan cannot stop our way; we shall arise and follow thee.

It was not a more busy than gainful trade that Matthew abandoned to follow Christ into poverty: and now he cast away his counters, and struck his tallies, and crossed his books, and contemned his heaps of cash in comparison of that better treasure which he foresaw lie open in that happy attendance. If any commodity be valued of us too dear to be parted with for Christ, we are more fit to be publicans than disciples.

Our Saviour invites Matthew to a discipleship; Matthew invites him to a feast. The joy of his call makes him begin his abdication of the world in a banquet. Here was not a more cheerful thankfulness in the inviter than a gracious humility in the guest. The new servant bids his Master; the publican his Saviour; and is honoured with so blessed a presence.

I do not find where Jesus was ever bidden to any table, and refused. If a pharisee, if a publican invited him, he made not dainty to go: not for the pleasure of the dishes; what was that to him who began his work in a whole Lent of days? but as it was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father, for the benefit of so winning a conversation. If he sat with sinners, he con-

verted them; if with converts, he confirmed and instructed them; if with the poor, he fed them; if with the rich in substance, he made them richer in grace. At whose board did he ever sit, and left not his host a gainer? The poor Bridegroom entertains him, and hath his waterpots filled with wine: Simon the pharisee entertains him, and hath his table honoured with the public remission of a penitent sinner, with the heavenly doctrine of remission: Zaccheus entertains him; salvation came that day to his house with the Author of it; that presence made the publican a son of Abraham: Matthew is recompensed for his feast with an apostleship: Martha and Mary entertain him; and, besides Divine instruction, receive their brother from the dead. O Saviour, whether thou feast us or we feast thee, in both of them is blessedness.

Where a publican is the feast-master, it is no marvel if the guests be publicans and sinners. Whether they came alone out of the hope of that mercy which they saw their fellow had found, or whether Matthew invited them to be partners of that plentiful grace whereof he had tasted, I inquire not. Publicans and sinners will flock together; the one hateful for their trade, the other for their vicious life. Common contempt hath wrought them to an unanimity; and sends them to seek mutual comfort in that society which all others held loathsome and contagious. Moderate correction humbleth and shameth the offender; whereas a cruel severity makes men desperate, and drives them to those courses whereby they are more dangerously infected. How many have gone into the prison faulty, and returned flagitious! If publicans were not sinners, they were no whit beholden to their neighbours.

What a tableful was here! the Son of God beset with publicans and sinners! O happy publicans and sinners that had found out their Saviour; O merciful Saviour, that disdained not publicans and sinners! What sinner can fear to kneel before thee when he sees publicans and sinners sit with thee? who can fear to be despised of thy meekness and mercy, which didst not abhor to converse with the outcasts of men? Thou didst not despise the thief confessing upon the cross, nor the sinner weeping upon thy feet, nor the Canaanite crying to thee in the way, nor the blushing adulteress, nor the odious publican, nor the forswearing disciple, nor the persecutor of disciples, nor thine own executioners: how can we be unwelcome to thee, if we come with tears in our

eyes, faith in our hearts, restitution in our hands? O Saviour, our breasts are too oft shut upon thee; thy bosom is ever open to us. We are as great sinners as the consorts of these publicans; why should we despair of a room at thy table?

The squinteyed pharisees look across at all the actions of Christ. Where they should have admired his mercy, they cavil at his holiness: *They said to his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* They durst not say thus to the Master, whose answer they knew would soon have convinced them. This wind, they hoped, might shake the weak faith of the disciples. They speak where they may be most likely to hurt. All the crew of satanical instruments have learnt this craft of their old tutor in Paradise.

We cannot reverence that man whom we think unholy. Christ had lost the hearts of his followers if they had entertained the least suspicion of his impurity, which the murmur of these envious pharisees would fain insinuate; "He cannot be worthy to be followed that is unclean; he cannot but be unclean that eateth with publicans and sinners." Proud and foolish pharisees! ye fast while Christ eateth; ye fast in your houses while Christ eateth in other mens'; ye fast with your own, while Christ feasts with sinners: but if ye fast in pride, while Christ eats in humility; if ye fast at home for merit or popularity, while Christ feasts with sinners for compassion, for edification, for conversion; your fast is unclean, his feast is holy; ye shall have your portion with hypocrites, when those publicans and sinners shall be glorious.

When those censurers thought the disciples had offended, they speak not to them, but to their Master; *Why do thy disciples that which is not lawful?* now, when they thought Christ offended, they speak not to him, but to the disciples. Thus, like true makebates, they go about to make a breach in the family of Christ, by setting off the one from the other.

The quick eye of our Saviour hath soon espied the pack of their fraud, and therefore he takes the words out of the mouths of his disciples into his own. They had spoke of Christ to the disciples, Christ answers for the disciples concerning himself, *The whole need not the physician, but the sick.* According to the two qualities of pride, scorn and overweening, these insolent pharisees overrated their own holiness, contemned the noted unholiness of others: as if themselves were not tainted with secret sins, as if others could not be cleansed by repentance. The Searcher of

hearts meets with their arrogance, and finds those justiciaries sinful, those sinners just. The spiritual Physician finds the sickness of those sinners wholesome, the health of those pharisees desperate: that wholesome, because it calls for the help of the Physician; this desperate, because it needs not. Every soul is sick, those most that feel it not. Those that feel it complain, those that complain have cure; those that feel it not shall find themselves dying ere they can wish to recover. O blessed Physician, *by whose stripes we are healed,* by whose death we live; happy are they that are under thy hands, sick, as of sin, so of sorrow for sin. It is as unpossible they should die, as it is unpossible for thee to want either skill or power or mercy. Sin hath made us sick unto death; make thou us but as sick of our sins, we are as safe as thou art gracious.

CHRIST AMONG THE GERGESENES; OR, LEGION AND THE GADARENE HERD.

Matthew viii; Mark v; Luke viii.

I do not any where find so furious a demoniac as amongst the Gergesenes. Satan is most tyrannous where he is obeyed most.

Christ no sooner sailed over the lake than he was met with two possessed Gadarenes; the extreme rage of the one hath drowned the mention of the other.

Yet in the midst of all that cruelty of the evil spirit there was sometimes a remission, if not an intermission of vexation. If *oft-times* Satan caught him, then sometimes in the same violence he caught him not. It was no thank to that malignant one, who, as he was indefatigable in his executions, so unmeasurable in his malice; but to the merciful overruling of God, who in a gracious respect to the weakness of his poor creatures, limits the spiteful attempts of that immortal enemy, and takes off this mastiff while we may take breath. He who in his justice gives way to some onsets of Satan, in his mercy restrains them; so regarding our deservings, that withal he regards our strength. If way should be given to that malicious spirit we could not subsist: no violent thing can endure; and if Satan might have his will we should no moment be free. He can be no more weary of doing evil to us than God is of doing good. Are we therefore preserved from the malignity of these powers of darkness? *Blessed be our strong*

Helper that hath not given us over to be a prey unto their teeth. Or if some scope have been given to that envious one to afflict us, hath it been with favourable limitations? It is thine only mercy, O God, that hath chained and muzzled up this ban-dog[a], so as that he may scratch us with his paws, but cannot pierce us with his fangs. Far, far is this from our deserts, who had too well merited a just abdication from thy favour and protection, and an interminable seizure by Satan both in soul and body.

Neither do I here see more matter of thanks to our God for our immunity from the external injuries of Satan, than occasion of serious inquiry into his power over us for the spiritual. I see some that think themselves safe from this ghostly tyranny, because they sometimes find themselves in good moods, free from the suggestions of gross sins, much more from the commission. Vain men, that feed themselves with so false and frivolous comforts! Will they not see Satan, through the just permission of God, the same to the soul in mental possessions that he is to the body in corporal? The worst demoniac hath his lightsome respites, not ever tortured, not ever furious: betwixt whiles he might look soberly, talk sensibly, move regularly. It is a woful comfort that we sin not always. There is no master so barbarous as to require of his slave a perpetual unintermitted toil; yet, though he sometimes eat, sleep, rest, he is a vassal still. If that wicked one have drawn us to a customary perpetration of evil, and have wrought us to a frequent iteration of the same sin, this is gage enough for our servitude, matter enough for his tyranny and insultation. He that would be our tormentor always, cares only to be sometimes our tempter.

The possessed is bound, as with the invisible fetters of Satan, so with the material chains of the inhabitants. What can bodily force prevail against a spirit? Yet they endeavour this restraint of the man, whether out of charity or justice: charity, that he might not hurt himself; justice, that he might not hurt others. None do so much befriend the demoniac as those that bind him. Neither may the spiritually possessed be otherwise handled; for though this act of the enemy be plausible, and to appearance pleasant, yet there is more danger in this dear and smiling tyranny. Two sorts of chains are fit for outrageous sinners; good laws, unpartial executions: that they may not hurt, that they may not be hurt to eternal death.

[a] [*Band-dog*, a dog kept in bands, or tied up; a mastiff. *Bailey*.]

These iron chains are no sooner fast than broken. There was more than an human power in this disruption. It is not hard to conceive the utmost of nature in this kind of actions. Samson doth not break the cords and ropes like a thread of tow, but God by Samson. The man doth not break these chains, but the Spirit. How strong is the arm of these evil angels! how far transcending the ordinary course of nature! They are not called *powers* for nothing.

What flesh and blood could but tremble at the palpable inequality of this match, if herein the merciful protection of our God did not the rather magnify itself, that so much strength met with so much malice hath not prevailed against us? In spite of both, we are in safe hands. He that so easily brake the iron fetters can never break the adamantine chain of our faith. In vain do the chafing billows of hell beat upon that Rock whereon we are built. And though these brittle chains of earthly metal be easily broken by him, yet the sure-tempered chain of God's eternal decree he can never break. That almighty Arbiter of heaven and earth and hell hath chained him up in the bottomless pit, and hath so restrained his malice, that but for our good we cannot be tempted; we cannot be foiled, but for a glorious victory.

Alas! it is no otherwise with the spiritually possessed. The chains of restraint are commonly broken by the fury of wickedness. What are the respects of civility, fear of God, fear of men, wholesome laws, careful executions, to the desperately licentious, but as cobwebs to an hornet? Let these wild demoniacs know that God hath provided chains for them that will hold, even *everlasting chains under darkness*. These are such as must hold the devils themselves (their masters) unto the judgment of the great day; how much more those impotent vassals! O that men would suffer themselves to be bound to their good behaviour by the sweet and easy recognizances of their duty to their God and the care of their own souls, that so they might rather be bound up in the bundle of life!

It was not for rest that these chains were torn off, but for more motion. This prisoner runs away from his friends; he cannot run away from his gaoler. He is now carried into the wilderness; not by mere external force, but by internal impulsion: carried, by the same power that unbound him, for the opportunity of his tyranny, for the horror of the place, for the affamishment of his body, for the avoidance of all means of resist-

ance. Solitary deserts are the delights of Satan. It is an unwise zeal that moves us to do that to ourselves in an opinion of merit and holiness, which the devil wishes to do to us for a punishment and conveniency of temptation. The evil spirit is for solitariness; God is for society; *He dwells in the assembly of his saints, yea, there he hath a delight to dwell.* Why should not we account it our happiness that we may have leave to dwell where the Author of all happiness loves to dwell?

There cannot be any misery incident unto us, whereof our gracious Redeemer is not both conscious and sensible. Without any entreaty therefore of the miserable demoniac, or suit of any friend, the God of spirits takes pity of his distress; and from no motion but his own commands the evil spirit to come out of the man. O admirable precedent of mercy, preventing our requests, exceeding our thoughts, forcing favours upon our impotence, doing that for us which we should and yet cannot desire! If men upon our instant solicitations would give us their best aid, it were a just praise of their bounty; but it well became thee, O God of mercy, to go without force, to give without suit. And do we think thy goodness is impaired by thy glory? If thou wert thus commiserative upon earth, art thou less in heaven? How dost thou now take notice of all our complaints, of all our infirmities! how doth thine infinite pity take order to redress them! What evil can befall us which thou knowest not, feelest not, relievest not? How safe are we that have such a Guardian, such a Mediator in heaven!

Not long before had our Saviour commanded the winds and waters, and they could not but obey him: now he speaks in the same language to the evil spirit; he entreats not, he persuades not; he commands. Command argues superiority. He only is infinitely stronger than the strong one in possession. Else, where powers are matched, though with some inequality, they tug for the victory, and, without a resistance, yield nothing.

There are no fewer sorts of dealing with Satan than with men. Some have dealt with him by suit, as the old Satanian heretics, and the present Indian savages, sacrificing to him that he hurt not; others by covenant, conditioning their service upon his assistance, as witches and magicians; others by insinuation of implicit compact, as charmers and figure-casters; others by adjuration, as the sons of Scæva and modern exorcists, unwarrantably charging him by a higher name than their own.

None ever offered to deal with Satan by a direct and primary command but the God of spirits. The great archangel, when the strife was about the body of Moses, commanded not, but imprecated rather, *The Lord rebuke thee, Satan.* It is only the God that made this spirit an angel of light that can command him now that he hath made himself the prince of darkness. If any created power dare to usurp a word of command, he laughs at their presumption, and knows them his vassals whom he dissembles to fear as his lords. It is thou only, O Saviour, at whose beck those stubborn principalities of hell yield and tremble. No wicked man can be so much a slave to Satan as Satan is to thee. The interposition of thy grace may defeat that dominion of Satan; thy rule is absolute, and capable of no let.

What need we to fear while we are under so omnipotent a Commander? *The waves of the deep rage horribly, yet the Lord is stronger than they.* Let those principalities and powers do their worst; those mighty adversaries are under the command of him who loved us so well as to bleed for us. What can we now doubt of? his power or his will? How can we profess him a God and doubt of his power? how can we profess him a Saviour and doubt of his will? He both can and will command those infernal powers. We are no less safe than they are malicious.

The devil saw Jesus by the eyes of the demoniac; for the same saw that spake: but it was the ill spirit that said, *I beseech thee, torment me not.* It was sore against his will that he saw so dreadful an object. The overruling power of Christ dragged the foul spirit into his presence. Guiltiness would fain keep out of sight. The limbs of so woful an head shall once call on the hills and rocks to hide them from the face of the Lamb: such lion-like terror is in that mild face when it looks upon wickedness. Neither shall it be one day the least part of the torment of the damned, to see the most lovely spectacle that heaven can afford. He from whom they fled in his offers of grace shall be so much more terrible as he was and is more gracious.

I marvel not therefore that the devil when he saw Jesus cried out: I could marvel that he fell down, that he worshipped him. That which the proud spirit would have had Christ to have done to him in his great duel, the same he now doth unto Christ, fearfully, servilely, forcedly. Who shall henceforth brag of the external homage he performs to the Son of God, when he sees Satan

himself fall down and worship? What comfort can there be in that which is common to us with devils, who, as they believe and tremble, so they tremble and worship?

The outward bowing is the body of the action; the disposition of the soul is the soul of it: therein lies the difference from the counterfeit stoopings of wicked men and spirits. The religious heart *serves the Lord in fear, and rejoices in him with trembling.* What it doth is in way of service; in service to his Lord, whose sovereignty is his comfort and protection; in the fear of a son, not of a slave; in fear tempered with joy; in a joy, but allayed with trembling: whereas the prostration of wicked men and devils is only an act of form or of force; as to their judge, as to their tormentor, not as to their Lord; in mere servility, not in reverence; in an uncomfortable dulness without all delight; in a perfect horror without capacity of joy. These worship without thanks, because they fall down without the true affections of worship.

Whoso marvels to see the devil upon his knees would much more marvel to hear what came from his mouth; *Jesu, the Son of the most high God:* a confession which if we should hear without the name of the author, we should ask from what saint it came. Behold the same name given to Christ by the devil which was formerly given him by the angel; *Thou shalt call his name Jesus.* That awful name, whereat every knee shall bow in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, is called upon by this prostrate devil. And lest that should not import enough, since others have been honoured by this name in type, he adds for full distinction, *The Son of the most high God.* The good Syrophenician and blind Bartimæus could say, *The Son of David:* it was well to acknowledge the true descent of his pedigree, according to the flesh; but this infernal spirit looks aloft, and fetcheth his line out of the highest heavens: *The Son of the most high God.* The famous confession of the prime apostle, which honoured him with a new name to immortality, was no other than, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;* and what other do I hear from the lips of a fiend? None more divine words could fall from the highest saint. Nothing hinders but that the veriest miscreant on earth, yea, the foulest devil in hell, may speak holily. It is no passing of judgment upon loose sentences. So, Peter should have been cast for a Satan, in denying, forswearing, cursing; and the devil should have been set up for a saint,

in confessing *Jesus the Son of the most high God.* Fond hypocrite, that pleasest thyself in talking well, hear this devil; and when thou canst speak better than he, look to fare better: but in the mean time know that a smooth tongue and a foul heart carries away double judgments.

Let curious heads dispute whether the devil knew Christ to be God. In this I dare believe himself, though in nothing else: he knew what he believed; what he believed, that he confessed, *Jesus the Son of the most high God;* to the confusion of those semi-Christians, that have either held doubtfully, or ignorantly misknown, or blasphemously denied, what the very devils have professed. How little can a bare speculation avail us in these cases of divinity! So far, this devil hath attained; to no ease, no comfort. *Knowledge* alone doth but *puff up;* it is our *love* that *edifies.* If there be not a sense of our sure interest in this Jesus, a power to apply his merits and obedience, we are no whit the safer, no whit the better; only we are so much the wiser, to understand who shall condemn us.

This piece of the clause was spoken like a saint; *Jesus, the Son of the most high God:* the other piece like a devil; *What have I to do with thee?* If the disclamation were universal, the latter words would impugn the former; for while he confesses Jesus to be *the Son of the most high God,* he withal confesses his own inevitable subjection. Wherefore would he beseech if he were not obnoxious? He cannot, he dare not say, "What hast thou to do with me?" but, "*What have I to do with thee?*" Others, indeed, I have vexed; thee, I fear. In respect then of any violence, of any personal provocation, *what have I to do with thee?*" And dost thou ask, O thou evil spirit, what hast thou to do with Christ while thou vexest a servant of Christ? Hast thou thy name from knowledge, and yet so mistakest him whom thou confessest, as if nothing could be done to him but what immediately concerns his own person? Hear that great and just Judge, sentencing upon his dreadful tribunal; *Inasmuch as thou didst it unto one of these little ones, thou didst it unto me.* It is an idle misprision, to sever the sense of an injury done to any of the members from the Head.

He that had humility enough to kneel to the Son of God hath boldness enough to expostulate, *Art thou come to torment us before our time?* Whether it were that Satan, who useth to enjoy the torment of sinners, whose music it is to hear our shrieks and

gnashings, held it no small piece of his torment to be restrained in the exercise of his tyranny; or whether the very presence of Christ were his rack, for the guilty spirit projecteth terrible things, and cannot behold the judge or the executioner without a renovation of horror; or whether that, as himself professeth, he were now in a fearful expectation of being commanded down into the deep for a further degree of actual torment, which he thus deprecates.

There are tortures appointed to the very spiritual natures of evil angels. Men that are led by sense have easily granted the body subject to torment, who yet have not so readily conceived this incident to a spiritual substance. The Holy Ghost hath not thought it fit to acquaint us with the particular manner of these invisible acts; rather willing that we should herein fear than inquire. But as all matters of faith, though they cannot be proved by reason, for that they are in an higher sphere, yet afford an answer able to stop the mouth of all reason that dares bark against them, since truth cannot be opposite to itself; so this of the sufferings of spirits.

There is therefore both an intentional torment incident to spirits, and a real. For as in blessedness the good spirits find themselves joined unto the Chief Good, and hereupon feel a perfect love of God, and unspeakable joy in him, and rest in themselves; so, contrarily, the evil spirits perceive themselves eternally excluded from the presence of God, and see themselves settled in a woful darkness; and from the sense of this separation arises an horror not to be expressed, not to be conceived. How many men have we known to torment themselves with their own thoughts! There needs no other gibbet than that which their troubled spirit hath erected in their own heart. And if some pains begin at the body, and from thence afflict the soul in a copartnership of grief; yet others arise immediately from the soul, and draw the body into a participation of misery. Why may we not therefore conceive mere and separate spirits capable of such an inward excruciation?

Besides which, I hear the Judge of men and angels say, *Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;* I hear the prophet say, *Tophet is prepared of old.* If, with fear and without curiosity, we may look upon those flames, why may we not attribute a spiritual nature to that more than natural fire? In the end of the world, the elements shall be dis-

solved by fire; and if the pure quintessential matter of the sky, and the element of fire itself, shall be dissolved by fire, then that last fire shall be of another nature than that which it consumeth. What hinders then but that the Omnipotent God hath from eternity created a fire of another nature, proportionable even to spiritual essences? or why may we not distinguish of fire, as it is itself, a bodily creature; and as it is an instrument of God's justice, so working, not by any material virtue or power of its own, but by a certain height of supernatural efficacy, to which it is exalted by the Omnipotence of that Supreme and Righteous Judge? Or, lastly, why may we not conceive, that though spirits have nothing material in their nature which that fire should work upon; yet by the judgment of the Almighty Arbiter of the world, justly willing their torment, they may be made most sensible of pain, and, by the obedible submission of their created nature, wrought upon immediately by their appointed tortures; besides the very horror which ariseth from the place whereto they are everlastingly confined? For, if the incorporeal spirits of living men may be held in a loathed or painful body, and conceive sorrow to be so imprisoned, why may we not as easily yield, that the evil spirits of angels or men may be held in those direful flames, and much more abhor therein to continue for ever?

Tremble rather, O my soul, at the thought of this woful condition of the evil angels who, for one only act of apostasy from God are thus perpetually tormented, whereas we sinful wretches multiply many and presumptuous offences against the majesty of our God. And withal admire and magnify that Infinite Mercy to the miserable generation of man, which, after this holy severity of justice to the revolted angels, so graciously forbears our heinous iniquities, and both suffers us to be free for the time from these hellish torments, and gives us opportunity of a perfect freedom from them for ever. *Praise the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, praise his holy name: who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thine infirmities; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with mercy and compassions.*

There is no time wherein the evil spirits are not tormented, there is a time wherein they expect to be tormented yet more: *Art thou come to torment us before our time?* They knew that the last assizes are the prefixed term of their full execution, which they also understood to be not yet come. For though

they knew not when the day of judgment should be, (a point concealed from the glorious angels of heaven,) yet they knew when it should not be; and therefore they say, *before the time.* Even the very evil spirits confess and fearfully attend a set day of universal sessions. They believe less than devils that either doubt of or deny that day of final retribution.

O the wonderful mercy of our God, that both to wicked men and spirits respites the utmost of their torment! He might upon the first instant of the fall of angels have inflicted on them the highest extremity of his vengeance; he might upon the first sins of our youth, yea of our nature, have swept us away, and given us our portion in that fiery lake: he stays a time for both, though with this difference of mercy to us men, that here not only is a delay, but may be an utter prevention of punishment, which to the evil spirits is altogether impossible. They do suffer, they must suffer; and though they have now deserved to suffer all they must, yet they must once suffer more than they do.

Yet so doth this evil spirit expostulate, that he sues; *I beseech thee, torment me not.* The world is well changed since Satan's first onset upon Christ. Then he could say, *If thou be the Son of God;* now, *Jesus, the Son of the most high God:* then, *All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me;* now, *I beseech thee, torment me not.* The same power, when he lists, can change the note of the tempter to us. How happy are we that have such a Redeemer as can command the devils to their chains! O consider this, ye lawless sinners, that have said, *Let us break his bonds, and cast his cords from us.* However the Almighty suffers you for a judgment to have free scope to evil, and ye can now impotently resist the revealed will of your Creator, yet the time shall come when ye shall see the very masters whom ye have served, the powers of darkness, unable to avoid the revenges of God. How much less shall man strive with his Maker! man, whose breath is in his nostrils, whose house is clay, whose foundation is the dust!

Nature teaches every creature to wish a freedom from pain. The foulest spirits cannot but love themselves, and this love must needs produce a deprecation of evil. Yet what a thing is this, to hear the devil at his prayers! *I beseech thee, torment me not.* Devotion is not guilty of this, but fear. There is no grace in the suit of devils but nature; no respect of glory to their Creator but their own ease. They cannot pray against sin, but against

torment for sin. What news is it now to hear the profanest mouth in extremity imploring the sacred name of God, when the devils do so? The worst of all creatures hates punishment, and can say, "Lead me not into pain:" only the good heart can say, *Lead me not into temptation.* If we can as heartily pray against sin for the avoiding of displeasure, as against punishment when we have displeased, there is true grace in the soul. Indeed, if we could fervently pray against sin we should not need to pray against punishment, which is no other than the inseparable shadow of that body; but if we have not laboured against our sins, in vain do we pray against punishment. God must be just, and *the wages of sin is death.*

It pleased our holy Saviour not only to let fall words of command upon this spirit, but to interchange some speeches with him. All Christ's actions are not for example. It was the error of our grandmother to hold chat with Satan. That God who knows the craft of that old serpent, and our weak simplicity, hath charged us not to inquire of an evil spirit. Surely if the disciples returning to Jacob's well wondered to see Christ talk with a woman, well may we wonder to see him talking with an unclean spirit.

Let it be no presumption, O Saviour, to ask upon what grounds thou didst this, wherein we may not follow thee. We know that sin was excepted in thy conformity of thyself to us; we know there was no guile found in thy mouth, no possibility of taint in thy nature, in thine actions; neither is it hard to conceive how the same thing may be done by thee without sin which we cannot but sin in doing. There is a vast difference in the intention, in the agent. For on the one side thou didst not ask the name of the spirit as one that knew not, and would learn by inquiring, but that by the confession of that mischief which thou pleasedst to suffer, the grace of the cure might be the more conspicuous, the more glorious: so on the other, God and man might do that safely which mere man cannot do without danger. Thou mightest touch the leprosy and not be legally unclean, because thou touchedst it to heal it, didst not touch it with possibility of infection. So mightest thou, who by reason of the perfection of thy divine nature wert incapable of any stain by the interlocution with Satan, safely confer with him, whom corrupt man, predisposed to the danger of such a parley, may not meddle with without sin, because not without peril. It is for none but God to

hold discourse with Satan. Our surest way is to have as little to do with that evil one as we may; and if he shall offer to maintain conference with us by his secret temptations, to turn our speech unto our God, with the archangel: *The Lord rebuke thee, Satan.*

It was the presupposition of him that knew it, that not only men but spirits have names. This then he asks, not out of an ignorance or curiosity; nothing could be hid from him who calleth the stars and all the hosts of heaven by their names; but out of a just respect to the glory of the miracle he was working, whereto the notice of the name would not a little avail. For if without inquiry or confession our Saviour had ejected this evil spirit, it had passed for the single dispossession of one only devil; whereas now it appears there was a combination and hellish champerty in these powers of darkness, which were all forced to vail unto that almighty command.

Before, the devil had spoken singularly of himself, *What have I to do with thee?* and, *I beseech thee, torment me not.* Our Saviour yet, knowing that there was a multitude of devils lurking in that breast, who dissembled their presence, wrests it out of the spirit by this interrogation, *What is thy name?* Now can those wicked ones no longer hide themselves: he that asked the question forced the answer; *My name is Legion.*

The author of discord hath borrowed a name of war: from that military order of discipline by which the Jews were subdued doth the devil fetch his denomination.

They were many; yet they say, *My name*, not "Our name:" though many, they speak as one, they act as one, in this possession. There is a marvellous accordance even betwixt evil spirits. That kingdom is not divided, for then it could not stand. I wonder not that wicked men do so conspire in evil, that there is such unanimity in the broachers and abettors of errors, when I see those devils, which are many in substance, are one in name, action, habitation. Who can too much brag of unity when it is incident unto wicked spirits? All the praise of concord is in the subject: if that be holy, the consent is angelical; if sinful, devilish.

What a fearful advantage have our spiritual enemies against us! If armed troops come against single stragglers, what hope is there of life, of victory? How much doth it concern us to band our hearts together in a communion of saints! Our enemies come upon us like a torrent: O let us not run asunder like drops in

the dust. All our united forces will be little enough to make head against this league of destruction.

Legion imports order, number, conflict.

Order: in that there is a distinction of regiment, a subordination of officers. Though in hell there be confusion of faces, yet not confusion of degrees.

Number: those that have reckoned a legion at the lowest have counted it six thousand; others have more than doubled it. Though here it is not strict, but figurative; yet the letter of it implies multitude. How fearful is the consideration of the number of apostate angels! And if a legion can attend one man, how many must we needs think are they who all the world over are at hand to the punishment of the wicked, the exercise of the good, the temptation of both? It cannot be hoped there can be any place or time wherein we may be secure from the onsets of these enemies. Be sure, ye lewd men, ye shall want no furtherance to evil; no torment for evil. Be sure, ye godly, ye shall not want combatants to try your strength and skill. Awaken your courages to resist, and stir up your hearts; make sure the means of your safety. There are more with us than against us. The God of heaven is with us if we be with him, and our angels behold the face of God. If every devil were a legion, we are safe. *Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we shall fear no evil. Thou, O Lord, shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of our enemies, and thy right hand shall save us.*

Conflict: all this number is not for sight, for rest; but for motion, for action. Neither was there ever hour since the first blow given to our first parents wherein there was so much as a truce betwixt these adversaries. As therefore strong frontier towns, when there is a peace concluded on both parts, break up their garrison, open their gates, neglect their bulwarks; but when they hear of the enemy mustering his forces in great and unequal numbers, then they double their guard, keep centinel, repair their sconces: so must we, upon the certain knowledge of our numerous and deadly enemies in continual array against us, address ourselves always to a wary and strong resistance. I do not observe the most to think of this ghostly hostility. Either they do not find there are temptations, or those temptations hurtful; they see no worse than themselves: and if they feel motions of evil arising in them, they impute it to fancy or unreasonable

appetite, to no power but nature's; and those motions they follow without sensible hurt, neither see they what harm it is to sin. Is it any marvel that carnal eyes cannot discern spiritual objects? that the world, who is the friend, the vassal of Satan, is in no war with him? Elisha's servant, when his eyes were opened, saw troops of spiritual soldiers which before he discerned not. If the eyes of our souls be once enlightened by supernatural knowledge and the clear beams of faith, we shall as plainly descry the invisible powers of wickedness as now our bodily eyes see heaven and earth. They are, though we see them not: we cannot be safe from them if we do not acknowledge, not oppose them.

The devils are now become great suitors to Christ; that he would not command them into the deep; that he would permit their entrance into the swine. What is this deep but hell, both for the utter separation from the face of God, and for the impossibility of passage to the region of rest and glory? The very evil spirits then fear and expect a further degree of torment. They know themselves reserved in those chains of darkness for the judgment of the great day. There is the same wages due to their sins and to ours; neither are the wages paid till the work be done. They, tempting men to sin, must needs sin grievously in tempting: as with us men, those that mislead into sin offend more than the actors. Not till the upshot therefore of their wickedness shall they receive the full measure of their condemnation. This *day*, this *deep*, they tremble at: what shall I say of those men that fear it not? It is hard for men to believe their own unbelief. If they were persuaded of this fiery dungeon, this bottomless deep, wherein every sin shall receive an horrible portion with the damned, durst they stretch forth their hands to wickedness? No man will put his hand into a fiery crucible, to fetch gold thence, because he knows it will burn him. Did we as truly believe the everlasting burning of that infernal fire, we durst not offer to fetch pleasures or profits out of the midst of those flames.

This degree of torment they grant in Christ's power to command; they knew his power unresistible: had he therefore but said, "Back to hell, whence ye came," they could no more have stayed upon earth than they can now climb into heaven. O the wonderful dispensation of the Almighty, who, though he could command all the evil spirits down to their dungeons in an instant, so as they should have no more opportunity of temptation, yet

thinks fit to retain them upon earth! It is not out of weakness or improvidence of that Divine hand that wicked spirits tyrannize here upon earth, but out of the most wise and most holy ordination of God, who knows how to turn evil into good, how to fetch good out of evil, and by the worst instruments to bring about his most just decrees. O that we could adore that awful and infinite power, and cheerfully cast ourselves upon that Providence which keeps the keys even of hell itself, and either lets out or returns the devils to their places.

Their other suit hath some marvel in moving it, more in the grant; *That they might be suffered to enter into the herd of swine.* It was their ambition of some mischief that brought forth this desire; that since they might not vex the body of man, they might yet afflict men in their goods. The malice of these envious spirits reacheth from us to ours. It is sore against their wills if we be not every way miserable.

If the swine were legally unclean for the use of the table, yet they were naturally good. Had not Satan known them useful for man, he had never desired their ruin. But as fencers will seem to fetch a blow at the leg when they intend it at the head, so doth this devil; while he drives at the swine, he aims at the souls of these Gadarenes: by this means he hoped well, and his hope was not vain, to work in these Gergesenes a discontentment at Christ, an unwillingness to entertain him, a desire of his absence; he meant to turn them into swine by the loss of their swine. It was not the rafters or stones of the house of Job's children that he bore the grudge to, but to the owners; nor to the lives of the children so much as the soul of their father. There is no affliction wherein he doth not strike at the heart; which while it holds free, all other damages are light; but *a wounded spirit,* whether with sin or sorrow, *who can bear?* Whatever becomes of goods or limbs, happy are we, if, like wise soldiers, we guard the vital parts. While the soul is kept sound from impatience, from distrust, our enemy may afflict us, he cannot hurt us.

They sue for a sufferance; not daring other than to grant, that without the permission of Christ they could not hurt a very swine. If it be fearful to think how great things evil spirits can do with permission, it is comfortable to think how nothing they can do without permission. We know they want not malice to destroy the whole frame of God's work; but of all, man; of all men, Christians: but, if without leave they cannot set upon an

hog, what can they do to the living images of their Creator? They cannot offer us so much as a suggestion without the permission of our Saviour. And can he, that would give his own most precious blood for us to save us from evil, wilfully give us over to evil?

It is no news that wicked spirits wish to do mischief; it is news that they are allowed it. If the Owner of all things should stand upon his absolute command, who can challenge him for what he thinks fit to do with his creature? The first foal of the ass is commanded, under the Law, to have his neck broken. What is that to us? The creatures do that they were made for, if they may serve any way to the glory of their Maker.

But seldom ever doth God leave his actions unfurnished with such reasons as our weakness may reach unto. There were sects amongst these Jews that denied spirits. They could not be more evidently, more powerfully convinced, than by this event. Now shall the Gadarenes see from what a multitude of devils they were delivered, and how easy it had been for the same power to have allowed these spirits to seize upon their persons as well as their swine. Neither did God this without a just purpose of their castigation. His judgments are righteous where they are most secret. Though we cannot accuse these inhabitants of aught, yet he could, and thought good thus to mulct them. And if they had not wanted grace to acknowledge it, it was no small favour of God that he would punish them in their swine for that which he might have avenged upon their bodies and souls. Our goods are farthest off us: if but in these we smart, we must confess to find mercy.

Sometimes it pleaseth God to grant the suits of wicked men and spirits in no favour to the suitors. He grants an ill suit, and withholds a good: he grants an ill suit in judgment, and holds back a good one in mercy. The Israelites ask meat; he gives quails to their mouths, and leanness to their souls. The chosen vessel wishes Satan taken off, and hears only, *My grace is sufficient for thee.* We may not evermore measure favours by condescent. These devils doubtless receive more punishment for that harmful act wherein they are heard. If we ask what is either unfit to receive or unlawful to beg, it is a great favour of our God to be denied.

Those spirits which would go into the swine by permission, go out of the man by command; they had stayed long, and are

ejected suddenly. The immediate works of God are perfect in an instant, and do not require the aid of time for their maturation.

No sooner are they cast out of the man than they are in the swine. They will lose no time, but pass without intermission from one mischief to another. If they hold it a pain not to be doing evil, why is it not our delight to be ever doing good?

The impetuousness was no less than the speed. *The herd was carried with violence from a steep place down into the lake, and was choked.* It is no small force that could do this; but if the swine had been so many mountains, these spirits upon God's permission had thus transported them. How easily can they carry those souls which are under their power to destruction! Unclean beasts, that wallow in the mire of sensuality, brutish drunkards transforming themselves by excess, even they are the swine whom the legion carries headlong to the pit of perdition.

The wicked spirits have their wish; the swine are choked in the waves. What ease is this to them? Good God, that there should be any creature that seeks contentment in destroying, in tormenting the good creatures of his Maker? This is the diet of hell. Those fiends feed upon spite towards man, so much more as he doth more resemble his Creator; towards all other living substances, so much more as they may be more useful to man.

The swine ran down violently; what marvel is it if their keepers fled? That miraculous work which should have drawn them to Christ drives them from him. They run with the news; the country comes in with clamour: *the whole multitude of the country about besought him to depart.* The multitude is a beast of many heads; every head hath a several mouth, and every mouth a several tongue, and every tongue a several accent; every head hath a several brain, and every brain thoughts of their own; so as it is hard to find a multitude without some division: at least seldom ever hath a good motion found a perfect accordance: it is not so infrequent for a multitude to conspire in evil. Generality of assent is no warrant for any act. Common error carries away many who inquire not into the reason of aught but the practice. The way to hell is a beaten road through the many feet that tread it. When vice grows into fashion, singularity is a virtue.

There was not a Gadarene found that either dehorted his fellows or opposed the motion. It is a sign of a people given up to judgment when no man makes head against projects of evil.

Alas! what can one strong man do against a whole throng of wickedness? Yet this good comes of an unprevailing resistance, that God forbears to plague where he finds but a sprinkling of faith. Happy are they who (like unto the celestial bodies, which being carried about with the sway of the highest sphere, yet creep on their own ways) keep on the courses of their own holiness against the swinge of common corruptions; they shall both deliver their own souls, and help to withhold judgment from others.

The Gadarenes sue to Christ for his departure. It is too much favour to attribute this to their modesty, as if they held themselves unworthy of so divine a guest. Why then did they fall upon this suit in a time of their loss? why did they not tax themselves, and intimate a secret desire of that which they durst not beg? It is too much rigour to attribute it to the love of their hogs, and an anger at their loss; then they had not entreated, but expelled him. It was their fear that moved this harsh suit; a servile fear of danger to their persons, to their goods, lest he that could so absolutely command the devils should have set these tormentors upon them, lest their other demoniacs should be dispossessed with like loss.

I cannot blame these Gadarenes that they feared. This power was worthy of trembling at. Their fear was unjust; they should have argued, "This man hath power over men, beasts, devils; it is good having him to our friend; his presence is our safety and protection." Now they contrarily misinfer, "Thus powerful is he; it is good he were farther off."

What miserable and pernicious misconstructions do men make of God, of divine attributes and actions! "God is omnipotent, able to take infinite vengeance of sin; O that he were not! He is provident, I may be careless; he is merciful, I may sin; he is holy, let him depart from me, for I am a sinful man." How witty sophisters are natural men, to deceive their own souls, to rob themselves of a God! O Saviour, how worthy are they to want thee that wish to be rid of thee! Thou hast just cause to be weary of us even while we sue to hold thee; but when once our wretched unthankfulness grows weary of thee, who can pity us to be punished with thy departure? who can say it is other than righteous, that thou shouldst regest one day upon us, *Depart from me, ye wicked.*

CONTEMPLATIONS

UPON

THE HISTORY OF

THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

THE SECOND VOLUME.

To the only honour and glory of God my Saviour; and to the benefit and behoof of his blessed Spouse, the Church; I do in all humility devote myself and all my Meditations.

The weak and unworthy Servant of both,

J. E.

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK IV.

TO THE READER.

THOSE few spare hours which I could either borrow or steal from the many employments of my busy diocese, I have gladly bestowed upon these, not more recreative than useful, Contemplations, for which I have been some years a debtor to the Church of God: now, in a care to satisfy the desires of many and my own preengagement, I send them forth into the light. My reader shall find the discourse in all these passages more large; and in the latter, as the occasion gives, more fervent: and if he shall miss some remarkable stories, let him be pleased to know, that I have purposely omitted those pieces which consist rather of speech than of act, and those that are in respect of the matter coincident to these I have selected. I have so done my task as fearing, not affecting, length; and as careful to avoid the cloying of my reader with other men's thoughts. Such as they are, I wish them, as I hope they shall be, beneficial to God's Church, and in them intend to set up my rest; beseeching my reader that he will mutually exchange his prayers for and with me, who am the unworthiest of the servants of Christ.

J. E.

THE FAITHFUL CANAANITE.—Matthew xv.

IT was our Saviour's trade to do good: therefore he came down from heaven to earth; therefore he changed one station of earth for another. Nothing more commends goodness than generality and diffusion, whereas reservedness and close-handed restraint blemish the glory of it. The sun stands not still in one point of heaven, but walks his daily round, that all the inferior world may share of his influences, both in heat and light. Thy bounty, O Saviour, did not affect the praise of fixedness, but motion; one while I find thee at Jerusalem, then at Capernaum, soon after in the utmost verge of Galilee, never but doing good.

But as the sun, though he daily compass the world, yet never walks from under his line, never goes beyond the turning points of the longest and shortest day; so neither didst thou, O Saviour, pass the bounds of thine own peculiar people. Thou wouldest move, but not wildly; not out of thine own sphere; wherein thy glorified estate exceeds thine humbled, as far as heaven is above earth. Now thou art lift up, thou drawest all men unto thee;

there are now no lists, no limits of thy gracious visitations; but as the whole earth is equidistant from heaven, so all the motions of the world lie equally open to thy bounty.

Neither yet didst thou want outward occasions of thy removal: perhaps the very importunity of the Scribes and Pharisees, in obtruding their traditions, drave thee thence; perhaps their unjust offence at thy doctrine. There is no readier way to lose Christ than to clog him with human ordinances, than to spurn at his heavenly instructions. He doth not always subduce his spirit with his visible presence; but his very outward withdrawing is worthy of our sighs, worthy of our tears. Many a one may say, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my* soul *had not died.*

Thou art now with us, O Saviour, thou art with us in a free and plentiful fashion; how long, thou knowest; we know our deservings, and fear. O teach us how happy we are in such a guest; and give us grace to keep thee. Hadst thou walked within the Phœnician borders, we could have told how to have made glad constructions of thy mercy in turning to the Gentiles: thou that couldest touch the lepers without uncleanness, couldst not be defiled with aliens: but we know the partition-wall was not yet broken down; and thou, that didst charge thy disciples not to walk into the way of the Gentiles, wouldst not transgress thine own rule. Once, we are sure, thou camest to the utmost point of the bounds of Galilee: as not ever confined to the heart of Jewry, thou wouldest sometimes bless the outer skirts with thy presence. No angle is too obscure for the Gospel: *the land of Zabulon and the land of Nepthalim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light.*

The sun is not scornful, but looks with the same face upon every plot of earth. Not only the stately palaces and pleasant gardens are visited by his beams, but mean cottages, but neglected bogs and moors. God's word is like himself, no accepter of persons: the wild Kern, the rude Scythian, the savage Indian are alike to it. The mercy of God will be sure to find out those that belong to his election, in the most secret corners of the world; like as his judgments will fetch his enemies from under the hills and rocks. The Good Shepherd walks the wilderness, to seek one sheep strayed from many. If there be but one Syrophœnician soul to be gained to the Church, Christ goes to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon to fetch her. Why are we weary to do good, when

our Saviour underwent this perpetual toil, in healing bodies and winning souls? There is no life happy but that which is spent in a continual drudging for edification.

It is long since we heard of the name or nation of Canaanites. All the country was once so styled. That people was now forgotten; yet, because this woman was of the blood of those Phœnicians which were anciently ejected out of Canaan, that title is revived to her. God keeps account of pedigrees after our oblivion, that he may magnify his mercies by continuing them to thousands of the generations of the just, and by renewing favours upon the unjust.

No nation carried such brands and scars of a curse as Canaan. To the shame of those careless Jews, even a faithful Canaanite is a suppliant to Christ, while they neglect so great salvation.

She doth not speak, but cry: need and desire have raised her voice to an importunate clamour. The God of mercy is light of hearing, yet he loves a loud and vehement solicitation; not to make himself inclinable to grant, but to make us capable to receive blessings. They are words, and not prayers which fall from careless lips. If we felt our want, or wanted not desire, we could speak to God in no tune but cries: if we would prevail with God, we must wrestle; and if we would wrestle happily with God, we must wrestle first with our own dulness. Nothing but cries can pierce heaven.

Neither doth her vehemence so much argue her faith, as doth her compellation, *O Lord, thou Son of David.* What proselyte, what disciple could have said more? O blessed Syrophœnician, who taught thee this abstract of divinity? What can we Christians confess more than the Deity and the humanity, the Messiaship of our glorious Saviour? his Deity, as Lord; his humanity, as a Son; his Messiaship, as the Son of David.

Of all the famous progenitors of Christ, two are singled out by an eminence. David and Abraham; a king, a patriarch: and though the patriarch were first in time, yet the king is first in place; not so much for the dignity of the person as the excellence of the promise which, as it was both later and fresher in memory, so more honourable. To Abraham was promised multitude and blessing of seed; to David, perpetuity of dominion: so as when God promiseth not to destroy his people, it is for Abraham's sake; when not to extinguish the kingdom, it is for David's sake. Had she said, "The son of Abraham," she had not come

home to this acknowledgment. Abraham is the father of the faithful; David, of the kings of Judah and Israel. There are many faithful; there is but one king; so as, in this title, she doth proclaim him the perpetual King of his Church; the rod or flower which should come from the root of Jesse, the true and only Saviour of the world. Whoso would come unto Christ to purpose must come in the right style, apprehending a true God, a true Man, a true God and Man: any of these severed from other makes Christ an idol and our prayers sin.

Being thus acknowledged, what suit is so fit for him as mercy? *Have mercy on me.* It was her daughter that was tormented; yet she says, *Have mercy on me.* Perhaps her possessed child was senseless of her misery; the parent feels both her sorrow and her own. As she was a good woman, so a good mother. Grace and good nature have taught her to appropriate the afflictions of this divided part of her own flesh. It is not in the power of another skin to sever the interest of our own loins or womb: we find some fowls that burn themselves while they endeavour to blow out the fire from their young: and even serpents can receive their brood into their mouth to shield them from danger. No creature is so unnatural as the reasonable that hath put off affection.

On me, therefore in mine; *for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* It was this that sent her to Christ; it was this that must incline Christ to her. I doubt whether she had inquired after Christ if she had not been vexed with her daughter's spirit. Our afflictions are as Benhadad's best counsellors, that sent him with a cord about his neck to the merciful king of Israel. These are the files and whetstones that set an edge on our devotions; without which they grow dull and ineffectual. Neither are they stronger motives to our suit than to Christ's mercy. We cannot have a better spokesman unto God than our own misery. That alone sues and pleads and importunes for us: this, which sets off men, whose compassion is finite, attracts God to us. Who can plead discouragements in his access to the throne of grace, when our wants are our forcible advocates? All our worthiness is in a capable misery.

All Israel could not example the faith of this Canaanite; yet she was thus tormented in her daughter. It is not the truth or strength of our faith that can secure us from the outward and bodily vexations of Satan; against the inward and spiritual, that

can and will prevail: it is no more antidote against the other than against fevers and dropsies. How should it, when as it may fall out that these sufferings may be profitable? And why should we expect that the love of our God shall yield to forelay any benefit to the soul? He is an ill patient that cannot distinguish betwixt an affliction and the evil of affliction. When the messenger of Satan buffets us, it is enough that God hath said, *My grace is sufficient for thee.*

Millions were in Tyre and Sidon, whose persons, whose children were untouched with that tormenting hand. I hear none but this faithful woman say, *My daughter is grievously vexed of the devil.* The worst of bodily afflictions are an insufficient proof of Divine displeasure. She that hath most grace complains of most discomfort.

Who would now expect any other than a kind answer to so pious and faithful a petition? *And behold, he answered her not a word.* O holy Saviour, we have oft found cause to wonder at thy words, never till now at thy silence. A miserable suppliant cries and sues, while the God of mercies is speechless. He that comforts the afflicted adds affliction to the comfortless by a willing disrespect. What shall we say then? Is the fountain of mercy dried up? O Saviour, couldst thou but hear! she did not murmur, not whisper, but cry out: couldst thou but pity, but regard her that was as good as she was miserable? If thy ears were open, could thy bowels be shut? Certainly, it was thou that didst put it into the heart, into the mouth of this woman to ask, and to ask thus of thyself. She could never have said, *O Lord, thou Son of David,* but from thee, but by thee. *None calleth Jesus the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.* Much more therefore didst thou hear the words of thine own making; and well wert thou pleased to hear what thou thoughtest good to forbear to answer. It was thine own grace that sealed up thy lips.

Whether for the trial of her patience and perseverance; for silence carried a semblance of neglect, and a willing neglect lays strong siege to the best fort of the soul; even calm tempers, when they have been stirred, have bewrayed impetuousness of passion; if there be any dregs in the bottom of the glass, when the water is shaken they will be soon seen: or whether for the more sharpening of her desires and raising of her zealous importunity; our holy longings are increased with delays; it whets our appetite to be held fasting: or whether for the more sweetening of the blessing

by the difficulty or stay of obtaining; the benefit that comes with ease is easily contemned; long and eager pursuit endears any favour: or whether for the engaging of his disciples in so charitable a suit: or whether for the wise avoidance of exception from the captious Jews: or lastly, for the drawing on of an holy, and imitable pattern of faithful perseverance; and to teach us not to measure God's hearing of our suit by his present answer, or his present answer by our own sense; while our weakness expects thy words, thy wisdom resolves upon thy silence.

Never wert thou better pleased to hear the acclamation of angels than to hear this woman say, *O Lord, thou Son of David;* yet silence is thy answer. When we have made our prayers, it is an happy thing to hear the report of them back from heaven; but if we always do not so, it is not for us to be dejected and to accuse either our infidelity or thy neglect: since we find here a faithful suitor met with a gracious Saviour, and yet *he answered her not a word.* If we be poor in spirit, God is rich in mercy; he cannot send us away empty, yet he will not always let us feel his condescent, crossing us in our will that he may advance our benefit.

It was no small fruit of Christ's silence that the disciples were hereupon moved to pray for her, not for a mere dismission; it had been no favour to have required this, but a punishment, for if to be held in suspense be miserable, to be sent away with a repulse is more; but for a merciful grant. They saw much passion in the woman, much cause of passion; they saw great discouragement on Christ's part, great constancy on hers. Upon all these they feel her misery and become suitors for her unrequested. It is our duty in case of necessity to intercede for each other, and by how much more familiar we are with Christ, so much more to improve our interest for the relief of the distressed. We are bidden to say, *Our Father*, not "mine;" yea, being members of one body we pray for ourselves in others. If the foot be pricked, the back bends, the head bows down, the eyes look, the hands stir, the tongue calls for aid, the whole man is in pain, and labours for redress. He cannot pray or be heard for himself that is no man's friend but his own. No prayer without faith, no faith without charity, no charity without mutual intercession.

That which urged them to speak for her is urged to Christ by them for her obtaining, *She cries after us.* Prayer is as an arrow, if it be drawn up but a little it goes not far, but if it be pulled up

to the head, it flies strongly and pierces deep: if it be but dribbled forth of careless lips, it falls down at our foot; the strength of our ejaculation sends it up into heaven and fetches down a blessing. The child hath escaped many a stripe by his loud crying, and the very unjust judge cannot endure the widow's clamour. Heartless motions do but teach us to deny, fervent suits offer violence both to earth and heaven.

Christ would not answer the woman, but doth answer the disciples. Those that have a familiarity with God shall receive answers, when strangers shall stand out. Yea, even of domestics, some are more entire: he that lay in Jesus' bosom could receive that intelligence which was concealed from the rest.

But who can tell whether that silence or this answer be more grievous? *I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* What is this answer but a defence of that silence and seeming neglect? While he said nothing, his forbearance might have been supposed to proceed from the necessity of some greater thoughts; but now his answer professeth that silence to have proceeded from a willing resolution not to answer; and therefore he doth not vouchsafe so much as to give to her the answer, but to her solicitors, that they might return his denial from him to her who had undertaken to derive her suit to him, *I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Like a faithful ambassador, Christ hath an eye to his commission. That may be violated, though to an apparent advantage. Whither he is not sent he may not go. As he, so all his have their fixed marks set; at these they aim, and think it not safe to shoot at rovers. In matter of morality, it is not for us to stand only upon inhibitions avoiding what is forbidden, but upon commands, endeavouring only what is enjoined. We need no other rule of our life than the intention of our several stations. And if he that was God would take no further scope to himself than the limits of his commission, how much doth it concern us frail men to keep within compass! or what shall become of our lawlessness that live in a direct contrariety to the will of him that sent us?

Israel was Jacob's name; from him derived to his posterity. Till the division of the tribes under Jeroboam all that nation was Israel: then the father's name went to the most, which were ten tribes; the name of the son Judah to the best, which were two. Christ takes no notice of this unhappy division. He remembers the ancient name which he gave to that faithful wrestler. It was

this Christ with whom Jacob strove; it was he that wrencht his hip, and changed his name, and dismissed him with a blessing; and now he cannot forget his old mercy to the house of Israel. To that only doth he profess himself sent. Their first brood were shepherds, now they are sheep; and those not guarded, not empastured, but strayed and lost. O Saviour, we see thy charge; the house of Israel, not of Esau; sheep, not goats, not wolves; lost sheep, not securely impaled in the confidence of their safe condition. Woe were to us if thou wert not sent to us. He is not a Jew which is one without. Every Israelite is not a true one. We are not of thy fold if we be not sheep. Thou wilt not reduce us to thy fold if we be not lost in our own apprehensions. O Lord, thou hast put a fleece upon our backs; we have lost ourselves enough: make us so sensible of our own wanderings, that we may find thee sent unto us, and may be happily found of thee.

Hath not this poor woman yet done? Can neither the silence of Christ nor his denial silence her? Is it possible she should have any glimpse of hope after so resolute repulses? yet still, as if she saw no argument of discouragement, she comes and worships and cries, *Lord, help me.* She which could not in the house get a word of Christ; she that saw her solicitors, though Christ's own disciples, repelled; yet she comes. Before, she followed; now, she overtakes him: before, she sued aloof; now, she comes close to him: no contempt can cast her off. Faith is an undaunted grace; it hath a strong heart and a bold forehead: even very denials cannot dismay it, much less delays. She came not to face, not to expostulate, but to prostrate herself at his feet. Her tongue worshipped him before; now, her knee. The eye of her faith saw that divinity in Christ which bowed her to his earth. There cannot be a fitter gesture of man to God than adoration.

Her first suit was for mercy; now, for help. There is no use of mercy but in helpfulness. To be pitied without aid is but an addition to misery. Who can blame us if we care not for an unprofitable compassion?

The very suit was gracious. She saith not, *Lord, if thou canst, help me,* as the father of the lunatic; but professes the power, while she begs the act; and gives glory where she would have relief.

Who now can expect other than a fair and yielding answer to

so humble, so faithful, so patient a suppliant? What can speed well if a prayer of faith from the knees of humility succeed not? And yet behold, the further she goes the worse she fares; her discouragement is doubled with her suit: *It is not good to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.* First, his silence implied a contempt; then, his answer defended his silence; now, his speech expresses and defends his contempt. Lo, he hath turned her from a woman to a dog; and, as it were, spurns her from his feet with an harsh repulse. What shall we say? is the Lamb of God turned lion? doth that clear Fountain of mercy run blood? O Saviour, did ever so hard a word fall from those mild lips? Thou calledst Herod *fox;* most worthily; he was crafty and wicked: the Scribes and Pharisees, *a generation of vipers;* they were venomous and cruel: Judas, *a devil;* he was both covetous and treacherous. But here was a woman in distress; and distress challenges mercy; a good woman, a faithful suppliant, a Canaanitish disciple, a Christian Canaanite; yet rated and whipt out for a dog by thee who wert all goodness and mercy! How different are thy ways from ours! Even thy severity argues favour. The trial had not been so sharp if thou hadst not found the faith so strong, if thou hadst not meant the issue so happy. Thou hadst not driven her away as a dog, if thou hadst not intended to admit her for a saint; and to advance her as much for a pattern of faith, as thou depressedst her for a spectacle of contempt.

The time was when the Jews were *children* and the Gentiles *dogs:* now the case is happily altered; the Jews are *the dogs,* (so their dear and divine countryman calls the concision,) we Gentiles are *the children.* What certainty is there in an external profession, that gives us only to seem, not to be; at least the being that it gives is doubtful and temporary? We may be children to day, and dogs to morrow. The true assurance of our condition is in the decree and covenant of God on his part, in our faith and obedience on ours. How they of children became dogs it is not hard to say: their presumption, their unbelief transformed them; and, to perfect their brutishness, they set their fangs upon the Lord of life. How we of dogs become children, I know no reason but, *O the depth!* Rom. xi. 33. That which at the first singled them out from the nations of the world hath at last singled us out from the world and them. *It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that hath*

mercy. Lord, how should we bless thy goodness that we of dogs are children! how should we fear thy justice, since they of children are dogs! O let us not be highminded, but tremble. If they were cut off who crucified thee in thine humbled estate, what may we expect who crucify thee daily in thy glory?

Now what ordinary patience would not have been overstrained with so contemptuous a repulse? how few but would have fallen into intemperate passions, into passionate expostulations! "Art thou the prophet of God that so disdainfully entertainest poor suppliants? Is this the comfort that thou dealest to the distressed? Is this the fruit of my humble adoration, of my faithful profession? Did I snarl or bark at thee, when I called thee *the Son of David?* Did I fly upon thee otherwise than with my prayers and tears? And if this term were fit for my vileness, yet doth it become thy lips? Is it not sorrow enough to me that I am afflicted with my daughter's misery, but that thou, of whom I hoped for relief, must add to mine affliction in an unkind reproach?" But here is none of all this. Contrarily, her humility grants all, her patience overcomes all, and she meekly answers, *Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*

The reply is not more witty than faithful. "O Lord, thou art truth itself. Thy words can be no other than truth. Thou hast called me a dog, and a dog I am; give me therefore the favour and privilege of a dog, that I may gather up some crumbs of mercy from under that table whereat thy children sit. This blessing, though great to me, yet to the infiniteness of thy power and mercy is but as a crumb to a feast. I presume not to press to the board, but to creep under it. Deny me not those small offals which else would be swept away in the dust. After this stripe, give me but a crumb, and I shall fawn upon thee and depart satisfied."

O woman, say I, great is thy humility, great is thy patience; but, *O woman,* saith my Saviour, *great is thy faith.* He sees the root, we the stock. Nothing but faith could thus temper the heart, thus strengthen the soul, thus charm the tongue.

O precious faith! O acceptable perseverance! It is no marvel if that chiding end in favour: *Be it to thee even as thou wilt.* Never did such grace go away uncrowned. The beneficence had been strait if thou hadst not carried away more than thou suedst for. Lo, thou that camest a dog goest away a child; thou that

wouldst but creep under the children's feet art set at their elbow; thou that wouldst have taken up with a crumb art feasted with full dishes. The way to speed well at God's hand is to be humbled in his eyes and in our own.

It is quite otherwise with God and with men. With men we are so accounted of as we account of ourselves: he shall be sure to be vile in the sight of others which is vile in his own. With God nothing is got by vain ostentation, nothing is lost by abasement. O God, when we look down to our own weakness, and cast up our eyes to thine infiniteness, thine omnipotence, what poor things we are! but when we look down upon our sins and wickedness, how shall we express our shame? None of all thy creatures, except devils, are capable of so foul a quality. As we have thus made ourselves worse than beasts, so let us in a sincere humbleness of mind acknowledge it to thee, who canst pity, forgive, redress it. So setting ourselves down at the lower end of the table of thy creatures, thou, the great Master of the feast, mayest be pleased to advance us to the height of glory.

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN CURED.—Mark vii.

Our Saviour's entrance into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon was not without a miracle, neither was his regress; as the sun neither rises nor sets without light. In his entrance he delivers the daughter of the faithful Syrophenician; in his egress he cures the deaf and dumb. He can no more want work than that work can want success.

Whether the patient were naturally deaf and perfectly dumb, or imperfectly dumb and accidentally deaf, I labour not. Sure I am that he was so deaf that he could not hear of Christ, so dumb that he could not speak for himself. Good neighbours supply his ears, his tongue; they bring him to Christ. Behold a miracle led in by charity, acted by power, led out by modesty.

It was a true office of love to speak thus in the cause of the dumb, to lend senses to him that wanted. Poor man! he had nothing to entreat for him but his impotence: here was neither ear to inform nor tongue to crave. His friends are sensible of his infirmity, and, unasked, bring him to cure. This spiritual service we owe to each other. It is true, we should be quick of hearing to the things of God and of our peace, quick of tongue

to call for our helps; but alas! we are naturally deaf and dumb to good. We have ear and tongue enough for the world; if that do but whisper, we hear it; if that do but draw back, we cry after it; we have neither for God. Ever since our ear was lent to the serpent in Paradise, it hath been spiritually deaf; ever since we set our tooth in the forbidden fruit, our tongue hath been speechless to God; and that which was faulty in the root is worse in the branches. Every soul is more deafened and bedumbed by increasing corruptions, by actual sins. Some ears the infinite mercy of God hath bored; some tongues he hath untied by the power of regeneration: these are wanting to their holy faculties, if they do not improve themselves in bringing the deaf and dumb unto Christ.

There are some deaf and dumb upon necessity; some others upon affectation. Those, such as live either out of the pale of the Church, or under a spiritual tyranny within the Church, we have no help for them but our prayers; our pity can reach farther than our aid: these, such as may hear of a Christ, and sue to him, but will not; a condition so much more fearful as it is more voluntary. This kind is full of woful variety: while some are deaf by an outward obturation, whether by the prejudice of the teacher, or by secular occasions and distractions; others, by the inwardly aposthuming tumours of pride, by the ill vapours of carnal affections, of froward resolutions. All of them, like the deaf adder, have their ears shut to the divine Charmer. O miserable condition of foolish men, so peevishly averse from their own salvation; so much more worthy of our commiseration, as it is more incapable of their own! These are the men whose cure we must labour; whom we must bring to Christ by admonitions, by threats, by authority, and, if need be, by wholesome compulsions.

They do not only lend their hand to the deaf and dumb, but their tongue also: they say for him that which he could not but wish to say for himself. Doubtless they had made signs to him of what they intended; and finding him forward in his desires, now they speak to Christ for him. Every man lightly hath a tongue to speak for himself; happy is he that keeps a tongue for other men. We are charged not with supplications only, but with intercessions. Herein is both the largest improvement of our love, and most effectual. No distance can hinder this fruit of our devotion. Thus we may oblige those that we shall never

see; those that can never thank us. This beneficence cannot impoverish us: the more we give, we have still the more. It is a safe and happy store, that cannot be impaired by our bounty.

What was their suit, but that Christ would put his hand upon the patient? Not that they would prescribe the means, or imply a necessity of his touch; but for that they saw this was the ordinary course both of Christ and his disciples, by touching to heal. Our prayers must be directed to the usual proceedings of God. His actions must be the rule of our prayers; our prayers may not prescribe his actions.

That gracious Saviour, who is wont to exceed our desires, does more than they sue for. Not only doth he touch the party, but takes him by the hand, and leads him from the multitude.

He that would be healed of his spiritual infirmities must be sequestered from the throng of the world. There is a good use in due times of solitariness. That soul can never enjoy God that is not sometimes retired. The modest Bridegroom of the Church will not impart himself to his Spouse before company. Or perhaps this secession was for our example, of a willing and careful avoidance of vainglory in our actions. Whence also it is that our Saviour gives an aftercharge of secrecy. He that could say, *He that doth evil hateth the light*, escheweth the light even in good. To seek our own glory is not glory. Although, besides this bashful desire of obscurity, here is a meet regard of opportunity in the carriage of our actions. The envy of the Scribes and Pharisees might trouble the passage of his divine ministry: their exasperation is wisely declined by his retiring. He in whose hands time is knows how to make his best choice of seasons. Neither was it our Saviour's meaning to have this miracle buried, but hid. Wisdom hath no better improvement than in distinguishing times, and discreetly marshalling the circumstances of our actions, which whosoever neglects shall be sure to shame his work and mar his hopes.

Is there a spiritual patient to be cured? Aside with him. To undertake him before the face of the multitude is to wound, not to heal him. Reproof and good counsel must be, like our alms, in secret; so as if possible one ear or hand might not be conscious to the other: as in some cases confession, so our reprehension must be auricular. The discreet chirurgeon, that would cure a modest patient, whose secret complaint hath in it more shame than pain, shuts out all eyes save his own. It is enough

for the God of justice to say, *Thou didst it secretly, but I will do it before all Israel, and before this sun.* Our limited and imperfect wisdom must teach us to apply private redresses to private maladies. It is the best remedy that is least seen and most felt.

What means this variety of ceremony? O Saviour, how many parts of thee are here active! Thy finger is put into the ear; thy spittle toucheth the tongue; thine eyes look up; thy lungs sigh; thy lips move to an *Ephphatha.* Thy word alone, thy beck alone, thy wish alone, yea, the least act of velleity from thee, might have wrought this cure. Why wouldst thou employ so much of thyself in this work? Was it to show thy liberty in not always equally exercising the power of thy Deity? in that one while thine only command shall raise the dead, and eject devils; another while thou wouldest accommodate thyself to the mean and homely fashions of natural agents, and, condescending to our senses and customs, take those ways which may carry some more near respect to the cure intended? or was it to teach us how well thou likest that there should be a ceremonious carriage of thy solemn actions, which thou pleasest to produce clothed with such circumstantial forms?

It did not content thee to put one finger into one ear, but into either ear wouldest thou put a finger. Both ears equally needed cure; thou wouldest apply the means of cure to both. The Spirit of God is the finger of God. Then dost thou, O Saviour, put thy finger into our ear when thy Spirit enables us to hear effectually. If we thrust our own fingers into our ears, using such human persuasions to ourselves as arise from worldly grounds, we labour in vain; yea, these stoppels must needs hinder our hearing the voice of God. Hence, the great philosophers of the ancient world, the learned rabbins of the synagogue, the great doctors of a false faith, are deaf to spiritual things. It is only that finger of thy Spirit, O blessed Jesu, that can open our ears, and make passage through our ears into our hearts. Let that finger of thine be put into our ears, so shall our deafness be removed, and we shall hear, not the loud thunders of the Law, but the gentle whisperings of thy gracious motions to our souls.

We hear for ourselves, but we speak for others. Our Saviour was not content to open the ears only, but to untie the tongue. With the ear we hear; with the mouth we confess. The same hand is applied to the tongue, not with a dry touch, but with

spittle: in allusion, doubtless, to the removal of the natural impediment of speech. Moisture, we know, glibs the tongue, and makes it apt to motion; how much more from that sacred mouth!

There are those whose ears are open, but their mouths are still shut to God. They understand, but do not utter the wonderful things of God. There is but half a cure wrought upon these men: their ear is but open to hear their own judgment, except their mouth be open to confess their Maker and Redeemer? O God, do thou so moisten my tongue with thy graces, that it may run smoothly *as the pen of a ready writer*, to the praise of thy name.

While the finger of our Saviour was on the tongue, in the ear of the patient, his eye was in heaven. Never man had so much cause to look up to heaven as he: there was his home, there was his throne. He only was *from heaven, heavenly*. Each of us hath a good mind homeward, though we meet with better sights abroad: how much more when our home is so glorious above the region of our peregrination! But thou, O Saviour, hadst not only thy dwelling there, but thy seat of Majesty. There the greatest angels adored thee; it is a wonder that thine eye could be ever anywhere but there. What doth thine eye in this, but teach ours where to be fixed? Every good gift and every perfect gift coming down from above, how can we look off from that place whence we receive all good? Thou didst not teach us to say, "O infinite God, which art everywhere;" but, *O our Father, which art in heaven*. There let us look up to thee. O let not our eyes or hearts grovel upon this earth, but let us fasten them above *the hills, whence cometh our salvation*. Thence let us acknowledge all the good we receive, thence let us expect all the good we want.

Why our Saviour looked up to heaven, though he had heaven in himself, we can see reason enough. But why did he sigh? Surely not for need; the least motion of a thought was in him impetratory. How could he choose but be heard of his Father who was one with the Father? Not for any fear of distrust, but partly for compassion, partly for example: for compassion of those manifold infirmities into which sin had plunged mankind, a pitiful instance whereof was here presented unto him: for example, to fetch sighs from us for the miseries of others; sighs of sorrow for them, sighs of desire for their redress. This is not the first time that our Saviour spent sighs, yea tears, upon human distresses. We are not bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, if

we so feel not the smart of our brethren, that the fire of our passion break forth into the smoke of sighs: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

Christ was not silent while he cured the dumb. His *Ephphatha* gave life to all these his other actions. His sighing, his spitting, his looking up to heaven were the acts of a man, but his command of the ear and mouth to open was the act of God. He could not command that which he made not: his word is imperative, ours supplicatory: he doth what he will with us, we do by him what he thinks good to impart.

In this mouth the word cannot be severed from the success. Our Saviour's lips are no sooner opened in his *Ephphatha*, than the mouth of the dumb and the ears of the deaf are opened. At once behold here celerity and perfection, Natural agents work by leisure, by degrees; nothing is done in an instant: by many steps is every thing carried from the entrance to the consummation. Omnipotency knows no rules. No imperfect work can proceed from a cause absolutely perfect. The man hears now more lightly than if he had never been deaf, and speaks more plainly than if he had never been tonguetied.

And can we blame him, if he bestowed the handsel of his speech upon the power that restored it? if the first improvement of his tongue were the praise of the Giver, of the Maker of it? or can we expect other than that our Saviour should say, "Thy tongue is free, use it to the praise of Him that made it so; thy ears are open, hear Him that bids thee proclaim thy cure upon the housetop?" But now behold, contrarily, he that opens this man's mouth by his powerful word, by the same word shuts it again; charging silence by the same breath wherewith he gave speech; *Tell no man.*

Those tongues which interceded for his cure are charged for the concealment of it. O Saviour, thou knowest the grounds of thine own commands. It is not for us to inquire, but to obey: we may not honour thee with a forbidden celebration.

Good meanings have ofttimes proved injurious. Those men whose charity employed their tongues to speak for the dumb man do now employ the same tongues to speak of his cure when they should have been dumb. This charge, they imagine, proceeds from an humble modesty in Christ; which the respect to his honour bids them violate. I know not how we itch after those forbidden acts, which, if left to our liberty, we willingly neglect.

This prohibition increaseth the rumour. Every tongue is busied about this one. What can we make of this but a well-meant disobedience?

O God, I should more gladly publish thy Name at thy command. I know thou canst not bid me to dishonour thee; there is no danger of such an injunction: but if thou shouldest bid me to hide the profession of thy Name and wondrous works, I should fulfil thy words, and not examine thine intentions. Thou knowest how to win more honour by our silence than by our promulgation. A forbidden good differs little from evil. What makes our actions to be sin but thy prohibitions? our judgment avails nothing. If thou forbid us that which we think good, it becomes as faulty to thee-ward as that which is originally evil. Take thou charge of thy glory; give me grace to take charge of thy precepts.

ZACCHÆUS.—Luke xix.

Now was our Saviour walking towards his Passion. His last journey had most wonders.

Jericho was in his way from Galilee to Jerusalem. He balks it not, though it were outwardly cursed; but, as the first Joshua saved a Rahab there, so there the second saves a Zacchæus: that, an harlot; this, a publican. The traveller was wounded as he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho; this man was taken from his Jericho to the true Jerusalem, and was healed.

Not as a passenger did Christ walk this way, but as a visitor; not to punish, but to heal. With us, the sick man is glad to send far for the physician; here, the Physician comes to seek patients, and calls at our door for work. Had not this Good Shepherd left the ninety-nine, and searched the desert, the lost sheep had never recovered the fold; had not his gracious frugality sought the lost groat, it had been swept up with the rushes, and thrown out in the dust. Still, O Saviour, dost thou walk through our Jericho. What would become of us, if thou shouldst stay till we seek thee alone? Even when thou hast found us, how hardly do we follow thee! The work must be all thine: we shall not seek thee, if thou find us not; we shall not follow thee, if thou draw us not.

Never didst thou, O Saviour, set one step in vain. Whereso-ever thou art walking, there is some Zacchæus to be won: as in a drought, when we see some weighty cloud hovering over us, we

say there is rain for some grounds, wheresoever it falls. The ordinances of God bode good to some souls; and happy are they on whom it lights.

How justly is Zacchæus brought in with a note of wonder! It is both great and good news to hear of a convert. To see men perverted from God to the world, from truth to heresy, from piety to profaneness, is as common as lamentable; every night such stars fall: but to see a sinner come home to God is both happy and wondrous to men and angels. I cannot blame that philosopher, who, undertaking to write of the hidden miracles of nature, spends most of his discourse upon the generation and formation of man: surely we are *fearfully and wonderfully made:* but how much greater is the miracle of our spiritual regeneration; that a son of wrath, a child of Satan, should be transformed into the son and heir of the everliving God! O God, thou workest both; but in the one, our spirit animates us; in the other, thine own.

Yet some things, which have wonder in them for their worth, lose it for their frequence; this hath no less rarity in it than excellence. How many painful Peters have complained to fish all night and catch nothing! Many professors and few converts hath been ever the lot of the Gospel. God's house, as the streets of Jericho, may be thronged, and yet but one Zacchæus. As therefore in the lottery, when the great prize comes, the trumpet sounds before it; so the news of a convert is proclaimed with, *Behold Zacchæus.* Any penitent had been worthy of a shout; but this man, by an eminence; a publican, a chief of the publicans, rich.

No name under heaven was so odious as this of a publican; especially to this nation, that stood so high upon their freedom, that every impeachment of it seemed no less than damnable: insomuch as they ask not, "Is it fit or needful?" but, *Is it lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar?* Any office of exaction must needs be heinous to a people so impatient of the yoke. And yet, not so much the trade, as the extortion, drew hatred upon this profession. Out of both they are deeply infamous. One while, they are matched with heathens; another while, with harlots; always, with sinners: *And behold, Zacchæus, a publican.*

We are all naturally strangers from God; the best is indisposed to grace; yet some there are whose very calling gives them better advantages. But this catchpole-ship of Zacchæus carried extortion

in the face; and, in a sort, bade defiance to his conversion; yet behold, from this tollbooth is called, both Zacchæus to be a disciple, and Matthew to be an apostle. We are in the hand of a cunning workman, that of the knottiest and crookedest timber can make rafters and ceiling for his own house, that can square the marble or flint as well as the freest stone. Who can now plead the disadvantage of his place, when he sees a publican come to Christ? No calling can prejudice God's gracious election.

To excel in evil must needs be worse. If to be a publican be ill, surely to be an arch-publican is more. What talk we of the chief of publicans, when he that professed himself the chief of sinners is now among the chief of saints?

Who can despair of mercy, when he sees one Jericho send both an harlot and a publican to heaven?

The trade of Zacchæus was not a greater rub in his way than his wealth. He that sent word to John for great news, that *the poor receive the gospel*, said also, *How hard is it for a rich man to enter into heaven!* This bunch of the camel keeps him from passing the needle's eye, although not by any malignity that is in the creature itself, (riches are the gift of God,) but by reason of those three pernicious hang-byes, cares, pleasures, pride, which too commonly attend upon wealth. Separate these, riches are a blessing. If we can so possess them that they possess not us, there can be no danger, much benefit in abundance. All the good or ill of wealth or poverty is in the mind, in the use. He that hath a free and lowly heart in riches is poor, he that hath a proud heart under rags is rich. If the rich man do good and distribute, and the poor man steal, the rich hath put off his woe to the poor. Zacchæus had never been so famous a convert if he had been poor, nor so liberal a convert if he had not been rich. If more difficulty, yet more glory was in the conversion of rich Zacchæus.

It is well that wealthy Zacchæus was desirous to see Christ. Little do too many rich men care to see that sight: the face of Cæsar in their coin is more pleasing. This man leaves his bags to bless his eyes with this prospect. Yet can I not praise him for this too much. It was not, I fear, out of faith but curiosity. He that had heard great fame of the man, of his miracles, would gladly see his face. Even an Herod longed for this, and was never the better. Only this I find, that this curiosity of the eye, through the mercy of God, gave occasion to the belief of the heart. He that desires to see Jesus is in the way to enjoy him; there is not

so much as a remote possibility in the man that cares not to behold him. The eye were ill bestowed if it were only to betray our souls; there are no less beneficial glances of it. We are not worthy of this useful casement of the heart if we do not thence send forth beams of holy desires, and thereby reconvey profitable and saving objects.

I cannot marvel if Zacchæus were desirous to see Jesus. All the world was not worth this sight. Old Simeon thought it best to have his eyes closed up with this spectacle, as if he held it pity and disparagement to see aught after it. The father of the faithful rejoiced to see him, though at nineteen hundred years' distance, and the great doctor of the Gentiles stands upon this as his highest stair, *Have I not seen the Lord Jesus?* And yet, O Saviour, many a one saw thee here that shall never see thy face above; yea, that shall call to the hills to hide them from thy sight: and *if we had once known thee according to the flesh, henceforth know we thee so no more.* What an happiness shall it be so to see thee glorious, that in seeing thee we shall partake of thy glory! O blessed vision, to which all others are but penal and despicable! Let me go into the mint-house and see heaps of gold, I am never the richer; let me go to the picturers, I see goodly faces, and am never the fairer; let me go to the court, I see state and magnificence, and am never the greater; but, O Saviour, I cannot see thee and not be blessed. I can see thee here, though in a glass. If the eye of my faith be dim, yet it is sure. O let me be unquiet till I do now see thee through the veil of heaven, ere I shall see thee as I am seen.

Fain would Zacchæus see Jesus, but he could not. It were strange if a man should not find some let in good desires; somewhat will be still in the way betwixt us and Christ. Here are two hinderances met, the one internal, the other external; the stature of the man, the prease of the multitude; the greatness of the prease, the smallness of the stature. There was great thronging in the streets of Jericho to see Jesus: the doors, the windows, the bulks were all full. Here are many beholders, few disciples. If gazing, if profession were godliness, Christ could not want clients; now, amongst all these wonderers there is but one Zacchæus. In vain should we boast of our forwardness to see and hear Christ in our streets, if we receive him not into our hearts.

This crowd hides Christ from Zacchæus. Alas! how common a thing it is, by the interposition of the throng of the world, to be

kept from the sight of our Jesus! Here a carnal fashionest says, "Away with this austere scrupulousness, let me do as the most:" the throng keeps this man from Christ. There a superstitious misbeliever says, "What tell you me of a handful of reformed? the whole world is ours:" this man is kept from Christ by the throng. The covetous mammonist says, "Let them that have leisure be devout, my employments are many, my affairs great:" this man cannot see Christ for the throng.

There is no perfect view of Christ but in an holy secession. The Spouse found not her Beloved till she was past the company; then she found him whom her soul loved. Whoso never seeks Christ but in the crowd, shall never find comfort in finding him. The benefit of our public view must be enjoyed in retiredness. If in a prease we see a man's face, that is all; when we have him alone every limb may be viewed. O Saviour, I would be loath not to see thee in thine assemblies, but I would be more loath not to see thee in my closet.

Yet had Zacchæus been but of the common pitch, he might perhaps have seen Christ's face over his fellows' shoulders: now his stature adds to the disadvantage. His body did not answer to his mind: his desires were high, while his body was low.

The best is, however smallness of stature was disadvantageous in a level, yet it is not so at height. A little man, if his eye be clear, may look as high, though not as far as the tallest. The least pigmy may from the lowest valley see the sun or stars as fully as a giant upon the highest mountain. O Saviour, thou art now in heaven: the smallness of our person or of our condition cannot let us from beholding thee. The soul hath no stature; neither is heaven to be had with reaching: only clear thou the eyes of my faith, and I am high enough.

I regard not the body; the soul is the man. It is to small purpose that the body is a giant, if the soul be a dwarf. We have to do with a God that measures us by our desires, not by our statures. All the streets of Jericho, however he seemed to the eye, had not so tall a man as Zacchæus.

The witty publican easily finds both his hinderances and the ways of their redress. His remedy for the prease is to run before the multitude; his remedy for his stature is to climb up into the sycamore: he employs his feet in the one, his hands and feet in the other. In vain shall he hope to see Christ that doth not outgo the common throng of the world. The multitude is clus-

tered together, and moves too close to move fast: we must be nimbler than they, if ever we desire or expect to see Christ.

It is the charge of God, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil:* we do evil if we lag in good. It is held commonly both wit and state for a man to keep his pace; and that man escapes not censure who would be forwarder than his fellows. Indeed, for a man to run alone in ways of indifferency, or to set an hypocritical face of outrunning all others in a zealous profession when the heart lingers behind, both these are justly hateful; but in an holy emulation, to strive truly and really to outstrip others in degrees of grace, and a conscionable care of obedience, this is truly Christian, and worthy of him that would hope to be blessed with the sight of a Saviour.

Tell me, ye fashionable Christians, that stand upon terms of equality, and will not go a foot before your neighbours in holy zeal and aidful charity, in conscionable sincerity; tell me, who hath made other men's progress a measure for yours? Which of you says, "I will be no richer, no greater, no fairer, no wiser, no happier than my fellows?" Why should you then say, "I will be no holier?" Our life is but a race. Every good end that a man proposes to himself is a several goal. Did ever any man that ran for a prize say, "I will keep up with the rest?" Doth he not know that if he be not foremost he loseth? We had as good to have sat still, as not *so* to *run that* we *may obtain*. We obtain not, if we outrun not the multitude.

So far did Zacchæus overrun the stream of the people, that he might have space to climb the sycamore ere Jesus could pass by.

I examine not the kind, the nature, the quality of this plant. What tree soever it had been, Zacchæus would have tried to scale it for the advantage of this prospect. He hath found out this help for his stature, and takes pains to use it. It is the best improvement of our wit, to seek out the aptest furtherances for our souls. Do you see a weak and studious Christian, that, being unable to inform himself in the matters of God, goes to the cabinet of heaven, *the priest's lips*, which *shall preserve knowledge?* there is Zacchæus in the sycamore.

It is the truest wisdom that helps forward our salvation. How witty we are to supply all the deficiencies of nature! If we be low, we can add cubits to our stature; if ill-coloured, we can borrow complexion; if hairless, perukes; if dimsighted, glasses; if lame, crutches: and shall we be conscious of our spiritual wants, and be

wilfully regardless of the remedy? Surely, had Zacchæus stood still on the ground, he had never seen Christ; had he not climbed the sycamore, he had never climbed into heaven. O Saviour, I have not height enough of my own to see thee; give me what sycamore thou wilt, give me grace to use it; give me an happy use of that grace.

The more I look at the mercy of Christ, the more cause I see of astonishment. Zacchæus climbs up into the sycamore to see Jesus; Jesus first sees him, preventing his eyes with a former view. Little did Zacchæus look that Jesus would have cast up his eyes to him. Well might he think the boys in the street would spy him out, and shout at his stature, trade, ambition; but that Jesus should throw up his eyes into the sycamore, and take notice of that small despised morsel of flesh, ere Zacchæus could find space to distinguish his face from the rest, was utterly beyond his thought or expectation. All his hope is to see; and now he is seen. To be seen and acknowledged is much more than to see. Upon any solemn occasion, many thousands see the prince whom he sees not; and if he please to single out any one, whether by his eye or by his tongue, amongst the prease, it passes for a high favour.

Zacchæus would have thought it too much boldness to have asked what was given him. As Jonathan did to David, so doth God to us, he shoots beyond us. Did he not prevent us with mercy, we might climb into the sycamore in vain. If he give grace to him that doth his best, it is the praise of the Giver, not the earning of the receiver. How can we do or will without him? If he see us first, we live; and if we desire to see him, we shall be seen of him.

Who ever took pains to climb the sycamore and came down disappointed? O Lord, what was there in Zacchæus that thou shouldest look up at him? A publican, a sinner, an arch-extortioner; a dwarf in stature, but a giant in oppression; a little man, but a great sycophant; if rich in coin, more rich in sins and treasures of wrath. Yet it is enough that he desires to see thee: all these disadvantages cannot hide him from thee. Be we never so sinful, if our desires towards thee be hearty and fervent, all the broad leaves of the sycamore cannot keep off thine eye from us. If we look at thee with the eye of faith, thou wilt look at us with the eye of mercy. *The eye of the Lord is upon the just;* and he is just that would be so; if not in himself,

yet in thee. O Saviour, when Zacchæus was above and thou wert below, thou didst look up at him: now thou art above and we below, thou lookest down upon us; thy mercy turns thine eyes every way towards our necessities. Look down upon us that are not worthy to look up unto thee, and find us out, that we may seek thee.

It was much to note Zacchæus, it was more to name him. Methinks I see how Zacchæus startled at this, to hear the sound of his own name from the mouth of Christ: neither can he but think, "Doth Jesus know me? Is it his voice or some other's in the throng? Lo, this is the first blink that ever I had of him. I have heard the fame of his wonderful works, and held it happiness enough for me to have seen his face; and doth he take notice of my person, of my name?"

Surely the more that Zacchæus knew himself, the more doth he wonder that Christ should know him. It was slander enough for a man to be a friend to a publican, yet Christ gives this friendly compellation to the chief of publicans, and honours him with this argument of a sudden entireness.

The favour is great, but not singular. Every elect of God is thus graced. The Father knows the child's name: as he calls the stars of heaven by their names, so doth he his saints, the stars on earth; and it is his own rule to his Israel, *I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.* As God's children do not content themselves with a confused knowledge of him, but aspire to a particular apprehension and sensible application, so doth God again to them: it is not enough that he knows them as in the crowd, wherein we see many persons, none distinctly; but he takes single and several knowledge of their qualities, conditions, motions, events. What care we that our names are obscure or contemned amongst men, while they are regarded by God; that they are raked up in the dust of earth, while they are recorded in heaven?

Had our Saviour said no more but *Zacchæus, come down*, the poor man would have thought himself taxed for his boldness and curiosity: it were better to be unknown than noted for miscarriage. But now the next words comfort him, *for I must this day abide at thine house.* What a sweet familiarity was here! As if Christ had been many years acquainted with Zacchæus whom he now first saw. Besides our use, the host is invited by the guest, and called to an unexpected entertainment. Well did

our Saviour hear Zacchæus's heart inviting him, though his mouth did not. Desires are the language of the soul; those are heard by him that is the God of spirits.

We dare not do thus to each other save where we have eaten much salt. We scarce go where we are invited. Though the face be friendly and the entertainment great, yet the heart may be hollow. But here, he that saw the heart and foreknew his welcome can boldly say, *I must this day abide at thine house.*

What a pleasant kind of entire familiarity there is betwixt Christ and a good heart! *If any man open, I will come in, and sup with him.* It is much for the King of glory to come into a cottage and sup there; yet thus he may do, and take some state upon him in sitting alone: no, "*I will* so *sup with him* that *he shall sup with me.*" Earthly state consists in strangeness, and affects a stern kind of majesty aloof. Betwixt God and us, though there be infinite more distance, yet there is a gracious affability and familiar entireness of conversation. O Saviour, what dost thou else every day but invite thyself to us in thy word, in thy sacraments? Who are we that we should entertain thee, or thou us? Dwarfs in grace, great in nothing but unworthiness. Thy praise is worthy to be so much the more as our worth is less. Thou that biddest thyself to us, bid us be fit to receive thee, and, in receiving thee, happy.

How graciously doth Jesus still prevent the publican; as in his sight, notice, compellation, so in his invitation too! That other publican, Levi, bade Christ to his house, but it was after Christ had bidden him to his discipleship. Christ had never been called to his feast, if Levi had not been called into his family. He loved us first, he must first call us, for he calls us out of love. As in the general calling of Christianity, if he did not say, *Seek ye my face,* we could never say, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek;* so in the specialties of our main benefits or employments Christ must begin to us. If we invite ourselves to him before he invite himself to us, the undertaking is presumptuous, the success unhappy.

If Nathanael, when Christ named him and gave him the memorial token of his being under the fig tree, could say, *Thou art the Son of God;* how could Zacchæus do less in hearing himself, upon this wild fig tree, named by the same lips? How must he needs think, "If he knew not all things, he could not know me; and if he knew not the hearts of men, he could not have known

my secret desires to entertain him? He is a God that knows me, and a merciful God that invites himself to me." No marvel therefore if upon this thought Zacchæus come down in haste.

Our Saviour said not, "Take thy leisure, Zacchæus;" but, *I will abide at thine house to day.* Neither did Zacchæus upon this intimation sit still and say, "When the prease is over, when I have done some errands of my office;" but he hastes down to receive Jesus. The notice of such a guest would have quickened his speed without a command. God loves not slack and lazy executions. The angels of God are described with wings: and we pray to do his will with their forwardness. Yea, even to Judas Christ saith, *What thou doest, do quickly.* O Saviour, there is no day wherein thou dost not call us by the voice of thy gospel; what do we still lingering in the sycamore? How unkindly must thou needs take the delays of our conversion! Certainly, had Zacchæus stayed still in the tree, thou hadst balked his house as unworthy of thee. What construction canst thou make of our wilful dilations, but as a stubborn contempt? How canst thou but come to us in vengeance, if we come not down to entertain thee in a thankful obedience?

Yet do I not hear thee say, "Zacchæus, cast thyself down for haste;" this was the counsel of the tempter to thee; but, *Come down in haste.* And he did accordingly. There must be no more haste than good speed in our performances. We may offend as well in our heady acceleration as in our delay. Moses ran so fast down the hill, that he stumbled spiritually and brake the tables of God. We may so fast follow after justice that we outrun charity. It is an unsafe obedience that is not discreetly and leisurely speedful.

The speed of his descent was not more than the alacrity of his entertainment: *He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.* The life of hospitality is cheerfulness. Let our cheer be never so great, if we do not read our welcome in our friend's face as well as in his dishes, we take no pleasure in it.

Can we marvel that Zacchæus received Christ joyfully? Who would not have been glad to have his house, yea himself, made happy with such a guest! Had we been in the stead of this publican, how would our hearts have leaped within us for joy of such a presence! How many thousand miles are measured by some devout Christians, only to see the place where his feet stood! How much happier must he needs think himself that owns the

roof that receives him! But O the incomparable happiness then of that man whose heart receives him, not for a day, not for years of days, not for millions of years, but for eternity! This may be our condition, if we be not straitened in our own bowels. O Saviour, do thou welcome thyself to these houses of clay, that we may receive a joyful welcome to thee in those everlasting habitations.

Zacchæus was not more glad of Christ than the Jews were discontented.

Four vices met here at once, Envy, Scrupulousness, Ignorance, Pride.

Their eye was evil, because Christ's was good. I do not hear any of them invite Christ to his home; yet they snarl at the honour of this unworthy host: they thought it too much happiness for a sinner, which themselves willingly neglected to sue for. Wretched men! They cannot see the mercy of Christ for being bleared with the happiness of Zacchæus; yea, that very mercy which they see, torments them. If that viper be the deadliest which feeds the sweetest, how poisonous must this disposition needs be that feeds upon grace! What a contrariety there is betwixt good angels and evil men! The angels rejoice at that whereat men pout and stomach: men are ready to cry and burst for anger at that which makes music in heaven. O wicked and foolish elder brother, that feeds on hunger and his own heart without doors, because his younger brother is feasting on the fat calf within!

Besides envy, they stand scrupulously upon the terms of traditions. These sons of the earth might not be conversed with; their threshold was unclean: *Touch me not, for I am holier than thou.* That he therefore, who went for a prophet, should go to the house of a publican and sinner, must needs be a great eyesore. They, that might not go in to a sinner, cared not what sins entered into themselves: the true cousins of those hypocrites who held it a pollution to go into the judgment-hall, no pollution to murder the Lord of life. There cannot be a greater argument of a false heart, than to stumble at these straws, and to leap over the blocks of gross impiety. Well did our Saviour know how heinously offensive it would be to turn in to this publican; he knows, and regards it not. A soul is to be won; what cares he for idle misconstruction? Morally good actions must not be suspended upon danger of causeless scandal. In things indifferent

and arbitrary, it is fit to be overruled by fear of offence; but if men will stumble in the plain ground of good, let them fall without our regard, not without their own peril. I know not if it were not David's weakness to *abstain from good words while the wicked were in place.* Let justice be done in spite of the world; and, in spite of hell, mercy.

Ignorance was in part guilty of these scruples. They thought Christ either too holy to go to a sinner, or in going made unholy. Foolish men! to whom came he? To you, righteous? Let himself speak: *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* Whither should the physician go but to the sick? *the whole need* him *not.* Love is the best attractive of us; and *he to whom much is forgiven loves much.* O Saviour, the glittering palaces of proud justiciaries are not for thee; thou lovest the lowly and ragged cottage of a contrite heart. Neither could here be any danger of thy pollution. Thy sun could cast his beams upon the impurest dunghill, and not be tainted. It was free and safe for the leper and bloody fluxed to touch thee: thou couldest heal them; they could not infect thee. Neither is it otherwise in this moral contagion. We, who are obnoxious to evil, may be insensibly defiled; thy purity was enough to remedy that which might mar a world. Thou canst help us; we cannot hurt thee. O let thy presence ever bless us, and let us ever bless thee for thy presence.

Pride was an attendant of this ignorance. So did they note Zacchæus for a sinner, as if themselves had been none. His sins were written in his forehead, theirs in their breast. The presumption of their secrecy makes them insult upon his notoriousness. The smoke of pride flies still upward, and in the mounting vanisheth: contrition beats it down, and fetcheth tears from the tender eyes. There are stage sins, and there are closet sins: these may not upbraid the other; they may be more heinous though less manifest. It is a dangerous vanity to look outward at other men's sins with scorn, when we have more need to cast our eyes inward, to see our own with humiliation.

Thus they stumbled and fell, but Zacchæus stood: all their malicious murmur could not dishearten his piety and joy in the entertaining of Christ. Before, Zacchæus lay down as a sinner; now, he stands up as a convert. Sinning is falling; continuance in sin is lying down; repentance is rising and standing up. Yet, perhaps, this standing was not so much the site of his constancy,

or of his conversion, as of his reverence. Christ's affability hath not made him unmannerly; *Zacchæus stood.* And what if the desire of more audibleness raised him to his feet? In that smallness of stature it was not fit he should lose aught of his height. It was meet so noble a proclamation should want no advantage of hearing.

Never was our Saviour better welcomed. The penitent publican makes his will, and makes Christ his supervisor. His will consists of legacies given, of debts paid, gifts to the poor, payments to the injured. There is liberality in the former, in the latter justice: in both, the proportions are large; *half to the poor, fourfold to the wronged.*

This hand sowed not sparingly. Here must needs be much of his own that was well gotten; whether left by patrimony, or saved by parsimony, or gained by honest improvement; for when he had restored fourfold to every one whom he had oppressed, yet there remained a whole half for pious uses; and this he so distributes that every word commends his bounty.

I give; and what is more free than gift? In alms we may neither sell, nor return, nor cast away. We sell if we part with them for importunity, for vainglory, for retribution: we return them, if we give with respect to former offices; this is to pay, not to bestow: we cast away, if in our beneficence we neither regard order nor discretion. Zacchæus did neither cast away, nor return, nor sell, but give.

I do give; not, "I will." The prorogation of good makes it thankless. The alms that smell of the hand lose the praise. It is twice given that is given quickly. Those that defer their gifts till their death-bed do as good as say, "Lord, I will give thee something when I can keep it no longer." Happy is the man that is his own executor.

I give my goods; not another's. It is a thankless vanity to be liberal of another man's purse. Whoso gives of that which he hath taken away from the owner doth more wrong in giving than in stealing. God expects our gifts, not our spoils. I fear there is too many a school and hospital every stone whereof may be challenged. Had Zacchæus meant to give of his extortions, he had not been so careful of his restitution: now he restores to others that he may give of his own.

I give half my goods: the publican's heart was as large as his estate: he was not more rich in goods than in bounty. Were this

example binding, who should be rich to give? who should be poor to receive? In the strait beginnings of the Church those beneficences were requisite, which afterwards, in the larger elbowroom thereof, would have caused much confusion. If the first Christians laid down all at the apostles' feet, yet, ere long, it was enough for the believing Corinthians every first day of the week to lay aside some pittance for charitable purposes. We are no disciples if we do not imitate Zacchæus, so far as to give liberally, according to the proportion of our estate. Giving is sowing; the larger seeding, the greater crop. Giving to the poor is fœneration to God: the greater bank, the more interest. Who can fear to be too wealthy? Time was when men faulted in excess: proclamations were fain to restrain the Jews, statutes were fain to restrain our ancestors. Now there needs none of this: men know how to shut their hands alone. Charity is in more danger of freezing than of burning. How happy were it for the Church if men were only closehanded to hold, and not limefingered to take.

To the poor; not to rich heirs. God gives to him that hath; we to him that wants. Some want because they would, whether out of prodigality or idleness; some want because they must; these are the fit subjects of our beneficence, not those other. A poverty of our own making deserves no pity. He that sustains the lewd feeds not his belly, but his vice.

So then this living legacy of Zacchæus is free, *I give;* present, *I do give;* just, *my goods;* large, *half my goods;* fit, *to the poor.*

Neither is he more bountiful in his gift than just in his restitution; *If I have taken aught from any man by false accusation, I restore it fourfold.*

It was proper for a publican to pill and pole the subject by devising complaints and raising causeless vexations, that his mouth might be stopped with fees either for silence or composition. This had Zacchæus often done. Neither is this *if* a note of doubt but of assertion. He is sure of the fact, he is not sure of the persons; their challenge must help to further his justice.

The true penitence of this holy convert expresses itself in confession, in satisfaction.

His confession is free, full, open. What cares he to shame himself that he may give glory to God? Woe be to that bashfulness that ends in confusion of face. O God, let me blush before men rather than be confounded before thee, thy saints and angels.

His satisfaction is no less liberal than his gift. Had not Zacchæus been careful to pay the debts of his fraud, all had gone to the poor. He would have done that voluntarily which the young man in the Gospel was bidden to do; and, refusing, went away sorrowful. Now he knew that his misbegotten gain was not for God's corban; therefore he spares half, not to keep, but to restore. This was the best dish in Zacchæus's good cheer. In vain had he feasted Christ, given to the poor, confessed his extortions, if he had not made restitution. Woe is me for the paucity of true converts! There is much stolen goods, little brought home. Mens' hands are like the fisher's flew; yea, like hell itself, which admits of no return. O God, we can never satisfy Thee; our score is too great, our abilities too little; but if we make not even with men, in vain shall we look for mercy from Thee. To each his own had been well, but four for one was munificent. In our transactions of commerce we do well to beat the bargain to the lowest: but in cases of moral or spiritual payments to God or men, now there must be a measure, pressed, shaken, running over. In good offices and due retributions we may not be pinching and niggardly. It argues an earthly and ignoble mind, where we have apparently wronged, to higgle and dodge in the amends.

O mercy and justice well repaid! *This day is salvation come to thine house.* Lo, Zacchæus, that which thou givest to the poor is nothing to that which thy Saviour gives to thee. If thou restorest four for one, here is more than thousands of millions for nothing. Were every of thy pence a world, they could hold no comparison with this bounty. It is but dross that thou givest, it is salvation that thou receivest. Thou gavest in present, thou dost not receive in hope; but, *This day is salvation come to thine house.* Thine ill-gotten metals were a strong bar to bolt heaven's gates against thee; now that they are dissolved by a seasonable beneficence and restitution, those gates of glory fly open to thy soul. Where is that man that can challenge God to be in his debt? Who can ever say, "Lord, this favour I did to the least of thine unrequited?" Thrice happy publican, that hast climbed from thy sycamore to heaven, and by a few worthless bags of unrighteous mammon hast purchased to thyself a kingdom *incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

JOHN BAPTIST BEHEADED.—Matthew xiv.

Three of the Evangelists have with one pen recorded the death of the great harbinger of Christ as most remarkable and useful.

He was the forerunner of Christ, as into the world, so out of it; yea, he that made way for Christ into the world made way for the name of Christ into the court of Herod. This Herod Antipas was son to that Herod who was and is ever infamous for the massacre at Bethlehem. Cruelty runs in a blood. The murderer of John, the forerunner of Christ, is well descended of him who would have murdered Christ, and for his sake murdered the infants.

It was late ere this Herod heard the fame of Jesus, not till he had taken off the head of John Baptist. The father of this Herod inquired for Christ too soon, this too late. Great men should have the best intelligence. If they improve it to all other uses of either frivolous or civil affairs, with neglect of spiritual, their judgment shall be so much more as their helps and means were greater.

Whether this Herod were taken up with his Arabian wars against Aretas his father-in-law, or whether he were employed in his journey to Rome, I inquire not; but if he were at home, I must wonder how he could be so long without the noise of Christ. Certainly it was a sign he had a very irreligious court, that none of his followers did so much as report to him the miracles of our Saviour, who doubtless told him many a vain tale the while. One tells him of his brother Philip's discontentment, another relates the news of the Roman court, another the angry threats of Aretas, another flatters him with the admiration of his new mistress, and disparagement of the old; no man so much as says, "Sir, there is a prophet in your kingdom that doth wonders." There was not a man in his country that had not been astonished with the fame of Jesus; yea, all Syria and the adjoining regions rung of it: only Herod's court hears nothing. Miserable is that greatness which keeps men from the notice of Christ.

How plain is it from hence that our Saviour kept aloof from the court! The austere and eremitical harbinger of Christ, it seems, preached there oft, and was heard gladly, though at last to his cost; while our Saviour, who was more sociable, came not there. He sent a message to that fox whose den he would not approach; whether it were that he purposely forbore, lest he

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should give that tyrant occasion to revive and pursue his father's suspicion; or whether, for that he would not so much honour a place so infamously graceless and disordered; or whether by his example to teach us the avoidance of outward pomp and glory.

Surely Herod saw him not till his death, heard not of him till the death of John Baptist. And now, his unintelligence was not more strange than his misconstruction; *This is John Baptist, whom I beheaded.* First he doubted, then he resolved; he doubted upon others' suggestions, upon his own apprehensions he resolved thus. And though he thought good to set a face on it to strangers, unto whom it was not safe to bewray his fear, yet to his domestics he freely discovered his thoughts, *This is John Baptist.* The troubled conscience will many a time open that to familiars which it hides from the eyes of others. Shame and fear meet together in guiltiness.

How could he imagine this to be John? That common conceit of transanimation could have no place here. There could be no transmigration of souls into a grown and well-statured body. That received fancy of the Jews held only in the case of conception and birth, not of full age.

What need we scan this point, when Herod himself professes *he is risen from the dead.* He that was a Jew by profession, and knew the story of Elisha's bones, of the Sareptan's and Shunamite's son, and in all likelihood had now heard of our Saviour's miraculous resuscitation of others, might think this power reflected upon himself. Even Herod, as bad as he was, believed a resurrection. Lewdness of life and practice may stand with orthodoxy in some main points of religion. Who can doubt of this when *the devils believe and tremble?* Where shall those men appear whose faces are Christian, but their hearts Sadducees?

O the terrors and tortures of a guilty heart! Herod's conscience told him he had offered an unjust and cruel violence to an innocent, and now he thinks that John's ghost haunts him. Had it not been for this guilt of his bosom, why might he not as well have thought that the same God whose hand is not shortened had conferred this power of miracles upon some other? Now it could be nobody but John that doth these wonders; "And how can it be," thinks he, "but that this revived prophet, who doth these strange things, will be revenged on me for his head? He that could give himself life can more easily take mine; how can I escape the hands of a now immortal and impassible avenger?"

A wicked man needs no other tormentor, especially for the sins of blood, than his own heart. Revel, O Herod, and feast and frolic, and please thyself with dances and triumphs and pastimes; thy sin shall be as some fury that shall invisibly follow thee, and scourge thy guilty heart with secret lashes, and upon all occasions shall begin thine hell within thee. He wanted not other sins that yet cried, *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God.*

What an honour was done to John in this misprision! While that man lived, the world was apt to think that John was the Christ; now that John is dead, Herod thinks Christ to be John. God gives to his poor conscionable servants a kind of reverence and high respect even from those men that malign them most, so as they cannot but venerate whom they hate. Contrarily, no wit or power can shield a lewd man from contempt.

John did no miracle in his life, yet now Herod thinks he did miracles in his resurrection, as supposing that a new supernatural life brought with it a supernatural power. Who can but wonder at the stupid partiality of Herod and these Jews? They can imagine and yield John risen from the dead, that never did miracle, and rose not; whereas Christ, who did infinite miracles, and rose from the dead by his almighty power, is not yielded by them to have risen. Their over-bountiful misconceit of the servant is not so injurious as their niggardly infidelity to the Master. Both of them shall convince and confound them before the face of God. But, O yet more blockish Herod! thy conscience affrights thee with John's resurrection, and flies in thy face for the cruel murder of so great a saint, yet where is thy repentance for so foul a fact? Who would not have expected that thou shouldest hereupon have humbled thyself for thy sin, and have laboured to make thy peace with God and him? The greater the fame and power was of him whom thou supposedst recovered from thy slaughter, the more should have been thy penitence. Impiety is wont to besot men, and turn them senseless of their own safety and welfare. One would have thought that our first grandsire Adam, when he found his heart to strike him for his disobedience, should have run to meet God upon his knees, and have sued for pardon of his offence; instead of that, he runs to hide his head among the bushes. The case is still ours; we inherit both his sin and his senselessness. Besides the infinite displeasure of God, wickedness makes the heart uncapable of grace, and impregnable of the means of conversion.

Even the very first act of Herod's cruelty was heinous. He was foul enough with other sins; *he added this above all, that he shut up John in prison.* The violence offered to God's messengers is branded for notorious. The sanctity and austere carriage of the man won him honour justly from the multitude, and aggravated the sin; but whatever his person had been, his mission was sacred: *he shall send his messenger.* The wrong redounds to the God that sent him. It is the charge of God, *Touch not mine anointed, nor do my prophets any harm.* The precept is perhaps one, for even prophets were anointed; but, at least, next to violation of majesty is the wrong to a prophet.

But what! do I not hear the Evangelist say that *Herod heard John gladly?* How is it then? Did John take the ear and heart of Herod, and doth Herod bind the hands and feet of John? Doth he wilfully imprison whom he gladly heard? How inconstant is a carnal heart to good resolutions! How little trust is to be given to the good motions of unregenerate persons! We have known when even mad dogs have fawned upon their master; yet he hath been too wise to trust them but in chains. As a true friend loves always, so a gracious heart always affects good; neither can be altered with change of occurrences. But the carnal man, like an hollow parasite or a fawning spaniel, flatters only for his own turn: if that be once either served or crossed, like a churlish cur, he is ready to snatch us by the fingers. Is there a worldlyminded man, that lives in some known sin, yet makes much of the preacher, frequents the church, talks godly, looks demurely, carries fair? Trust him not: he will prove, after his pious fits, like some resty horse which goes on some paces readily and eagerly, but anon either stands still or falls to flinging and plunging, and never leaves till he have cast his rider.

What then might be the cause of John's bonds and Herod's displeasure? *For Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.* That woman was the subject of Herod's lust, and the exciter of his revenge. This light huswife ran away with her husband's brother; and now doting upon her incestuous lover, and finding John to be a rub in the way of her licentious adultery, is impatient of his liberty, and will not rest till his restraint. Resolved sinners are mad upon their lewd courses, and run furiously upon their gainsayers. A bear robbed of her whelps is less impetuous. Indeed, those that have determined to love their sins more than their souls, whom can they care for?

Though Herod was wicked enough, yet, had it not been upon Herodias's instigation, he had never imprisoned John. Importunity of lewd solicitors may be of dangerous consequence; and many times draws greatness into those ways which it either would not have thought of or abhorred. In the remotion of the wicked is the establishment of the throne.

Yet still is this dame called *the wife of Philip*. She had utterly left his bed, and was solemnly coupled to Herod; but all the ritual ceremonies of her new nuptials cannot make her other than Philip's wife. It is a sure rule, "That which is originally faulty can never be rectified." The ordination of marriage is, one for one; *They twain shall be one flesh*. There cannot be two heads to one body, nor two bodies to one head. Herod was her adulterer; he was not her husband: she was Herod's harlot; Philip's wife. Yet how doth Herod dote on her, that for her sake he loads John with irons!

Whither will not the fury of inordinate lust transport a man? Certainly, John was of late in Herod's favour. That roughhewn preacher was for a wilderness, not for a court. Herod's invitation drew him thither; his reverence and respects encouraged him there: now, the love of his lust hath carried him into a hate of God's messenger. That man can have no hold of himself or care of others who hath given the reins to his unruly concupiscence. He that hath once fixed his heart upon the face of an harlot, and hath beslaved himself to a bewitching beauty, casts off at once all fear of God, respect to laws, shame of the world, regard of his estate, care of wife, children, friends, reputation, patrimony, body, soul; so violent is this beastly passion where it takes; neither ever leaves till it have hurried him into the chambers of death.

Herodias herself had first plotted to kill the Baptist; her murderers were suborned, her ambushes laid: the success failed; and now she works with Herod for his durance. O marvellous hand of the Almighty! John was a mean man for estate; solitary, guardless, unarmed, impotent: Herodias, a queen; so great that she swayed Herod himself; and not more great than subtle; and not more great or subtle than malicious; yet Herodias laid to kill John, and could not. What an invisible and yet sure guard there is about the poor servants of God that seem helpless and despicable in themselves! There is over them an hand of divine protection, which can be no more opposed than seen. Malice is

not so strong in the hand as in the heart. The devil is stronger than a world of men; a legion of devils stronger than fewer spirits; yet a legion of devils cannot hurt one swine without a permission. What can bands of enemies or gates of hell do against God's secret ones? *It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in princes.*

It is not more clear who was the author than what was the motive of this imprisonment, the free reproof of Herod's incest; *It is not lawful*, &c. Both the offenders were nettled with this bold reprehension. Herod knew the reputation that John carried; his conscience could not but suggest the foulness of his own fact; neither could he but see how odious it would seem to persecute a prophet for so just a reproof; for the colour therefore of so tyrannical an act, he brands John with sedition. These presumptuous taxations are a disgrace and disparagement to authority. It is no news with wicked tyrants, to cloak their cruelty with pretences of justice. Never was it other than the lot of God's faithful servants to be loaded with unjust reproaches in the conscionable performance of their duties. They should speed too well in the opinion of men if they might but appear in their true shape.

The fact of Herod was horrible and prodigious; to rob his own brother of the partner of his bed; to tear away part of his flesh, yea his body from his head: so as here was at once in one act adultery, incest, violence:—adultery, that he took another's wife; incest, that he took his brother's; violence, that he thus took her in spite of her husband. Justly therefore might John say, *It is not lawful for thee.* He balked not one of Herod's sins, but reproved him of all the evils that he had done; though more eminently of this, as that which more filled the eye of the world. It was not the crown or awful sceptre of Herod that could daunt the homely but faithful messenger of God: as one that came in the spirit of Elias, he fears no faces, spares no wickedness. There must meet in God's ministers courage and impartiality: impartiality, not to make difference of persons; courage, not to make spare of the sins of the greatest. It is an hard condition that the necessity of our calling casts upon us in some cases to run upon the pikes of displeasure. Prophecies were no burdens if they did not expose us to these dangers. We must connive at no evil; every sin unreproved becomes ours.

Hatred is the daughter of truth. Herod is inwardly vexed

with so peremptory a reprehension; and now he seeks to kill the author.

And why did he not? *He feared the people.* The time was when he feared John no less than now he hates him: he once reverenced him as a just and holy man, whom now he heartburns as an enemy. Neither was it any counterfeit respect: sure the man was then in earnest. What shall we say then? was it that his inconstant heart was now fetched off by Herodias, and wrought to a disaffection? or was it with Herod as with Solomon's sluggard, that at once would and would not? His thoughts are distracted with a mixed voluntary contradiction of purposes: as an holy man and honoured of the people, he would not kill John; he would kill him as an enemy to his lust. The worst part prevaileth. Appetite oversways reason and conscience; and now, were it not for fear of the people, John should be murdered. What a self-conflicting and prodigious creature is a wicked man left over to his own thoughts, while on the one side he is urged by his conscience, on the other by his lustful desires and by the importunity of Satan! *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;* and, after all his inward broils, he falls upon the worst; so as his yieldance is worse than his fight. When God sees fit, Herod's tyranny shall effect that which the wise providence of the Almighty hath decreed for his servant's glory. In the mean while rubs shall be cast in his way; and this for one, *he feared the people.*

What an absurd and sottish thing is hypocrisy! Herod fears the people; he fears not God. Tell me then, Herod, what could the people do at the worst? Perhaps mutiny against thee; raise arms and tumults; disturb the government; it may be, shake it off. What could God do? yea, what not? Stir up all his creatures to plague thee; and when he hath done, tumble thee down to hell, and there torment thee everlastingly. O fond Herod, that fearest where no fear was, and fearest not where there is nothing but terror!

How God fits lewd men with restraints! If they be so godless as to regard his creature above himself, he hath external bugs to affright them withal; if bashful, he hath shame; if covetous, losses; if proud, disgrace: and by this means the most wise Providence keeps the world in order. We cannot better judge of our hearts than by what we most fear.

No man is so great as to be utterly exempted from fear. The

Jews feared Herod; Herod feared the Jews: the healthful fear sickness; the free, servitude: the people fear a tyrant's oppression and cruelty; the tyrant fears the people's mutiny and insurrection. If there have been some so great as to be above the reach of the power and machinations of inferiors; yet never any that have been free from their fears and suspicions. Happy is he that fears nothing but what he should, God.

Why did Herod fear the people? *They held John for a prophet.* And this opinion was both common and constant: even the scribes and Pharisees durst not say his baptism was from men.

It is the wisdom and goodness of God ever to give his children favour somewhere. If Jezebel hate Elias, Ahab shall for the time honour him; and if Herod hate the Baptist, and would kill him, yet the people reverence him. Herod's malice would make him away; the people's reputation keeps him alive. As wise princes have been content to maintain a faction in their court or state for their own purposes; so here did the God of heaven contrive and order differences of judgment and affection betwixt Herod and his subjects for his own holy ends. Else certainly, if all wicked men should conspire in evil, there could be no being upon earth; as contrarily, if evil spirits did not accord, hell could not stand.

O the unjust and fond partiality of this people! They all generally applaud John for a prophet, yet they receive not his message. Whose prophet was John but of the Highest? What was his errand but to be the waymaker unto Christ? What was he, but the voice of that eternal Word of his Father? What was the sound of that voice but, *Behold the Lamb of God; he that comes after me is greater than I; whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose?* Yet they honour the servant and reject the Master; they contemn that Prince whose ambassador they reverence. How could they but argue, "John is a prophet; he speaks from God, his words must be true, he tells us this is the Lamb of God, the Messias that should come to redeem the world: this must then needs be he, we will look for no other?" Yet this perverse people receives John and rejects Jesus. There is ever an absurdity in unbelief, while it separates those relations and respects which can never in nature be disjoined. Thus it readily apprehends God as merciful in pardoning, not as just in punishing; Christ as a Saviour, not as a Judge. Thus we ordinarily, in a contrariety to these Jews, profess to receive the Master, and con-

temn the servants; while He hath said that will make it good, *He that despiseth you despiseth me.*

That which Herod in policy durst not, in wine he dares do; and that which God had restrained till his own time, now in his own time he permits to be done. The day was, as one of the Evangelists styles it, *convenient;* if for the purpose of Herodias, I am sure for God's; who having determined to glorify himself by John's martyrdom, will cast it upon a time when it may be most notified, *Herod's birthday.* All the peers of the country, perhaps of the neighbour nations, are now assembled. Herodias could not have found out a time more fit to blazon her own shame and cruelty than in such a confluence. The wise providence of God many times pays us with our own choice, so as when we think to have brought about our own ends to our best content, we bring about his purposes to our own confusion.

Herod's birthday is kept, and so was Pharaoh's; both of them with blood. These personal stains cannot make the practice unlawful. Where the man is good, the birth is memorable. What blessing have we if life be none? and if our life be a blessing, why should it not be celebrated? Excess and disorder may blemish any solemnity; but that cleaves to the act, not to the institution.

Herod's birthday was kept with a feast, and this feast was a supper. It was fit to be a night work; this festivity was spent in works of darkness, not of the light; it was a child of darkness that was then born, not of the day: *Those that are drunken are drunk in the night.* There is a kind of shame in sin, even where it is committed with the stiffest resolution, at least there was wont to be; if now sin be grown impudent, and justice bashful, woe be to us.

That there might be perfect revels at Herod's birthday, besides the feast, there is music and dancing; and that by Salome, the daughter of Herodias. A meet daughter for such a mother, bred according to the disposition of so immodest a parent. Dancing, in itself, as it is a set regular harmonious motion of the body, cannot be unlawful, more than walking or rnnning. Circumstances may make it sinful. The wanton gesticulations of a virgin, in a wild assembly of gallants warmed with wine, could be no other than riggish and unmaidenly. It is not so frequently seen that the child follows the good qualities of the parent, it is seldom seen that it follows not the evil. Nature is the soil, good and ill qua-

lities are the herbs and weeds; the soil bears the weeds naturally, the herbs not without culture. What with traduction, what with education, it were strange if we should miss any of our parents' misdispositions.

Herodias and Salome have what they desired. The dance pleased Herod well; those indecent motions that would have displeased any modest eye, (though what should a modest eye do at Herod's feast?) over-pleased Herod. Well did Herodias know how to fit the tooth of her paramour, and had therefore purposely so composed the carriage and gesture of her daughter as it might take best; although doubtless the same action could not have so pleased from another. Herod saw in Salome's face and fashion the image of her whom he doted on; so did she look, so did she move; besides that his lavish cups had predisposed him to wantonness: and now he cannot but like well that which so pleasingly suited his inordinate desire. All humours love to be fed, especially the vicious, so much more as they are more eager and stirring. There cannot be a better glass wherein to discern the face of our hearts than our pleasures; such as they are, such are we, whether vain or holy.

What a strange transportation was this! *Whatsoever thou shalt ask.* Half a kingdom for a dance! Herod, this pastime is overpaid for; there is no proportion in this remuneration; this is not bounty, it is prodigence. Neither doth this pass under a bare promise only, but under an oath, and that solemn and (as it might be in wine) serious. How largely do sensual men both proffer and give for a little momentary and vain contentment! how many censure Herod's gross impotence, and yet second it with a worse giving away their precious souls for a short pleasure of sin! What is half a kingdom, yea a whole world, to a soul? So much therefore is their madness greater as their loss is more.

So large a boon was worthy of a deliberation. Salome consults with her mother upon so ample and ratified a promise. Yet so much good nature and filial respect was in this wanton damsel, that she would not carve herself of her option, but takes her mother with her. If Herodias were infamously lewd, yet she was her parent, and must direct her choice. Children should have no will of their own. As their flesh is their parents', so should their will be. They do justly unchild themselves that, in main elections, dispose of themselves without the consent of those which gave them being. It is both unmannerly and unnatural in the

child to run before, without, against the will of the parent. O that we could be so officious to our good and heavenly Father, as she was to an earthly and wicked mother; not to ask, not to undertake aught without his allowance, without his directions: that when the world shall offer us whatsoever our heart desires, we could run to the oracles of God for our resolution, not daring to accept what he doth not both license and warrant.

O the wonderful strength of malice! Salome was offered no less than half the kingdom of Herod, yet chooses to ask the head of a poor preacher. Nothing is so sweet to a corrupt heart as revenge, especially when it may bring with it a full scope to a dear sin. All worldlings are of this diet: they had rather sin freely for a while, and die, than refrain, and live happily eternally.

What a suit was this! *Give me here, in a charger, the head of John Baptist.* It is not enough for her to say, "Let John's head be cut off;" but, *Give me it in a charger.* What a service was here to be brought into a feast, especially to a woman! A dead man's head swimming in blood. How cruel is a wicked heart, that can take pleasure in those things which have most horror!

O the importunity of a galled conscience! Herodias could never think herself safe till John was dead; she could never think him dead till his head were off: she could not think his head was off till she had it brought her in a platter: a guilty heart never thinks it hath made sure enough. Yea, even after the head was thus brought, they thought him alive again. Guiltiness and security could never lodge together in one bosom.

Herod was sorry, and, no doubt, in earnest, in the midst of his cups and pleasance. I should rather think his jollity counterfeited than his grief. It is true, Herod was a fox; but that subtle beast dissembles not always: when he runs away from the dogs, he means as he does. And if he were formerly willing to have killed John, yet he was unwillingly willing; and so far as he was unwilling to kill him as a prophet, as a just man, so far was he sorry that he must be killed. Had Herod been wise, he had not been perplexed. Had he been so wise as to have engaged himself lawfully, and within due limits, he had not now been so entangled as to have needed sorrow. The folly of sinners is guilty of their pain, and draws upon them a late and unprofitable repentance.

But here the act was not past, though the word were past. It was his misconceived entanglement that caused this sorrow, which might have been remedied by flying off.

A threefold cord tied him to the performance; the conscience of his oath, the respect to his guests, a loathness to discontent Herodias and her daughter.

Herod had so much religion as to make scruple of an oath; not so much as to make scruple of a murder. No man casts off all justice and piety at once; but while he gives himself over to some sins he sticks at others. It is no thank to lewd men that they are not universally vicious. All God's several laws cannot be violated at once. There are sins contrary to each other; there are sins disagreeing with the lewdest dispositions; there are oppressors that hate drunkenness; there are unclean persons which abhor murder; there are drunkards which hate cruelty. One sin is enough to damn the soul, one leak to drown the vessel. But, O fond Herod! what needed this unjust scrupulousness? well and safely mightest thou have shifted the bond of thine oath with a double evasion; one, that this generality of thy promise was only to be construed of lawful acts and motions; that only can we do which we can justly do; unlawfulness is in the nature of impossibility: the other, that had this engagement been so meant, yet might it be as lawfully rescinded as it was unlawfully made; a sinful promise is ill made, worse performed. Thus thou mightest, thou shouldest have come off fair; where now, holding thyself by an irreligious religion tied to thy foolish and wicked oath, thou only goest away with this mitigation, that thou art a scrupulous murderer. In the mean while, if an Herod made such conscience of keeping an unlawful oath, how shall he in the day of judgment condemn those Christians which make no conscience of oaths lawful, just, necessary! Woe is me! one sells an oath for a bribe; another lends an oath for favour; another casts it away for malice. I fear to think it may be a question whether there be more oaths broken or kept. O God, I marvel not, if, being implored as a witness, as an avenger of falsehood, thou hold him not guiltless that thus dares take thy Name in vain.

Next to his oath is the respect to his honour. His guests heard his deep engagement, and now he cannot fall off with reputation. It would argue levity and rashness to say and not to do; and what would the world say? The misconceits of the

points of honour have cost millions of souls. As many a one doth good only to be seen of men, so many a one doth evil only to satisfy the humour and opinion of others. It is a damnable plausibility so to regard the vain approbation or censure of the beholders, as in the mean time to neglect the allowance or judgment of God. But how ill guests were these! how well worthy of an Herod's table! Had they had but common civility, finding Herod perplexed, they had acquitted him by their dissuasions, and would have disclaimed the expectation of so bloody a performance; but they rather, to gratify Herodias, make way for so slight and easy a condescent. Even godly princes have complained of the iniquity of their heels: how much more must they needs be ill attended that give encouragements and examples of lewdness!

Neither was it the least motive that he was loath to displease his mistress. The damsel had pleased him in her dance; he would not discontent her in breaking his word. He saw Herodias in Salome. The suit, he knew, was the mother's, though in the daughter's lips; both would be displeased in falling off, both would be gratified in yielding. O vain and wicked Herod! he cares not to offend God, to offend his conscience; he cares to offend a wanton mistress. This is one means to fill hell, loathness to displease. A good heart will rather fall out with all the world than with God, than with his conscience.

The misgrounded sorrow of worldly hearts doth not withhold them from their intended sins. It is enough to vex, not enough to restrain them. Herod was sorry, but he sends the executioner for John's head.

One act hath made Herod a tyrant and John a martyr. Herod a tyrant; in that, without all legal proceedings, without so much as false witnesses, he takes off the head of a man, of a prophet; it was lust that carried Herod into murder: the proceedings of sin are more hardly avoided than the entrance: whoso gives himself leave to be wicked knows not where he shall stay: John a martyr, in dying for bearing witness to the truth; truth in life, in judgment, in doctrine.

It was the holy purpose of God, that he which had baptized with water should now be baptized with blood. Never did God mean that his best children should dwell always upon earth: should they stay here, wherefore hath he provided glory above? Now would God have John delivered from a double prison;

of his own, of Herod's; and placed in the glorious liberty of his sons. His head shall be taken off, that it may be crowned with glory. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

O happy birthday, not of Herod, but of the Baptist! Now doth John enter into his joy; and, in this name, is this day ever celebrated of the Church. This blessed forerunner of Christ said of himself, *I must decrease.* He is decreased indeed, and now grown shorter by the head; but he is not so much decreased in stature as increased in glory. For one minute's pain he is possessed of endless joy; and as he came before his Saviour into the world, so is he gone before him into heaven.

The head is brought in a charger. What a dish was here for a feast! How prodigiously insatiable is the cruelty of a wicked heart! O blessed service, fit for the table of heaven! It is not for thee, O wicked Herod, nor for thee, malicious and wanton Herodias; it is a dish, precious and pleasing to the God of heaven, to the blessed angels, who looked upon that head with more delight in his constant fidelity than the beholders saw it with horror, and Herodias with contentment of revenge.

It is brought to Salome as the reward of her dance; she presents it to her mother as the dainty she had longed for. Methinks, I see how that chaste and holy countenance was tossed by impure and filthy hands; that true and faithful tongue, those sacred lips, those pure eyes, those mortified cheeks, are now insultingly handled by an incestuous harlot, and made a scorn to the drunken eyes of Herod's guests.

O the wondrous judgments and incomprehensible dispositions of the holy, wise, almighty God! He that was sanctified in the womb, born and conceived with so much note and miracle, (*what manner of child shall this be?*) lived with so much reverence and observation, is now, at midnight, obscurely murdered in a close prison, and his head brought forth to the insultation and irrision of harlots and ruffians. O God, thou knowest what thou hast to do with thine own! Thus thou sufferest thine to be misused and slaughtered here below, that thou mayest crown them above. It should not be thus, if thou didst not mean that their glory should be answerable to their depression.

THE FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISHES.

Matthew xiv.

What flocking there was after Christ, which way soever he went! how did the kingdom of heaven suffer an holy violence in these his followers! Their importunity drave him from the land to the sea. When he was upon the sea of Tiberias, they followed him with their eyes; and when they saw which way he bent, they followed him so fast on foot, that they prevented his landing. Whether it were that our Saviour stayed some while upon the water, as that which yielded him more quietness and freedom of respiration; or whether the foot-passage, as it oft falls out, were the shorter cut, by reason of the compasses of the water and the many elbows of the land, I inquire not: sure I am, the wind did not so swiftly drive on the ship, as desire and zeal drave on these eager clients.

Well did Christ see them all the way; well did he know their steps and guided them: and now he purposely goes to meet them whom he seemed to flee. Nothing can please God more than our importunity in seeking him: when he withdraws himself, it is that he may be more earnestly inquired for. Now then he comes to find them whom he made show to decline; and seeing a great multitude, he passes from the ship to the shore. That which brought him from heaven to earth brought him also from the sea to land; his compassion on their souls, that he might teach them; compassion on their bodies, that he might heal and feed them.

Judea was not large but populous: it could not be, but there must be, amongst so many men, many diseased.

It is no marvel if the report of so miraculous and universal sanations drew customers. They found three advantages of cure above the power and performance of any earthly physician, certainty, bounty, ease; certainty, in that all comers were cured without fail; bounty, in that they were cured without charge; ease, in that they were cured without pain. Far be it from us, O Saviour, to think that thy glory hath abated of thy mercy: still and ever thou art our assured, bountiful, and perfect Physician, who healest all our diseases and takest away all our infirmities. O that we could have our faithful recourse to thee in all our spiritual maladies: it were as impossible we should want help as that thou shouldest want power and mercy.

That our Saviour might approve himself every way beneficent, he that had filled the souls of his auditors with spiritual repast will now fill their bodies with temporal; and he that had approved himself the universal Physician of his Church will now be known to be the great Householder of the world, by whose liberal provision mankind is maintained. He did not more miraculously heal than he feeds miraculously.

The disciples, having well noted the diligent and importune attendance of the multitude, now, towards evening, come to their Master in a care of their repast and discharge; *This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.* How well it becomes even spiritual guides to regard the bodily necessities of God's people! This is not directly in our charge; neither may we leave our sacred ministration to serve tables; but yet, as the bodily father must take care for the soul of his child, so must the spiritual have respect to the body. This is all that the world commonly looks after, measuring their pastors more by their dishes than by their doctrine or conversation; as if they had the charge of their bellies, not of their souls. If they have open cellars, it matters not whether their mouths be open. If they be sociable in their carriage, favourable and indulgent to their recreations, full in their cheer, how easily doth the world dispense with either their negligence or enormities! as if the souls of these men lay in their weasand, in their gut. But surely they have reason to expect from their teachers a due proportion of hospitality. An unmeet parsimony is here not more odious than sinful; and where ability wants, yet care may not be wanting. Those preachers which are so intent upon their spiritual work, that in the mean time they overstrain the weaknesses of their people, holding them in their devotions longer than human frailty will permit, forget not themselves more than their pattern; and must be sent to school to these compassionate disciples, who, when evening was come, sue to Christ for the people's dismission.

The place was desert; the time, evening. Doubtless our Saviour made choice of both these, that there might be both more use and more note of his miracle. Had it been in the morning, their stomach had not been up, their feeding had been unnecessary. Had it been in the village, provision either might have been made, or at least would have seemed made by themselves.

But now that it was both desert and evening, there was good ground for the disciples to move, and for Christ to work, their sustentation. Then only may we expect and crave help from God when we find our need. Superfluous aid can neither be heartily desired, nor earnestly looked for, nor thankfully received from the hands of mercy. *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.* If it be not a burden, it is no casting it upon God. Hence it is that Divine aid comes ever in the very upshot and exigence of our trials, when we have been exercised and almost tired with long hopes, yea with despairs of success; that it may be both more longed for ere it come, and, when it comes, more welcome.

O the faith and zeal of these clients of Christ! They not only follow him from the city into the desert, from delicacy to want, from frequence to solitude, but forget their bodies in pursuit of the food of their souls.

Nothing is more hard for a healthful man to forget than his belly; within few hours this will be sure to solicit him, and will take no denials. Yet, such sweetness did these hearers find in the spiritual repast, that they thought not on the bodily. The disciples pitied them, they had no mercy on themselves. By how much more a man's mind is taken up with heavenly things, so much less shall he care for earthly. What shall earth be to us when we are all spirit? And in the mean time, according to the degrees of our intellectual elevations, shall be our neglect of bodily contentments.

The disciples think they move well: *Send them away, that they may buy victuals.* Here was a strong charity but a weak faith: a strong charity, in that they would have the people relieved; a weak faith, in that they supposed they could not otherwise be so well relieved. As a man when he sees many ways lie before him takes that which he thinks both fairest and nearest, so do they: this way of relief lay openest to their view, and promised most. Well might they have thought, "It is as easy for our Master to feed them as to heal them; there is an equal facility in all things to a supernatural power:" yet they say, *Send them away.* In all our projects and suits we are still ready to move for that which is most obvious, most likely; when sometimes that is less agreeable to the will of God. The allwise and almighty Arbiter of all things hath a thousand secret means to honour himself in his proceedings with us. It is not for us to

[illegible] for ourselves, but we must humbly depend on the [illegible] of his wisdom and mercy.

[illegible] answer gives a strange check to their motion; *They need not depart.* Not need? They had no victuals: they [illegible] there was none to be had. What more need could [illegible] He knew the supply which he intended, though they knew [illegible] His command was therefore more strange than his asser- [illegible] them to eat. Nothing gives what it hath not. Had [illegible] they had not called for a dismission: and, not [illegible] they give? It was thy wisdom, O Saviour, [illegible] disciples for the intended miracle. Thou [illegible] without an intimation, both of the [illegible] And how modestly dost thou [illegible] without ostentation! I hear thee not [illegible] *Give ye:* as if it should be [illegible]

[illegible] thee to require of us what we are [illegible] either that thou mayest show us what we [illegible] or that thou mayest erect us to a [illegible] which cannot do it for us: as when the [illegible] to her which hath not yet the steady [illegible] he may cling the faster to her hand or [illegible] Thou hast us, impotent wretches, to keep [illegible] what can we sinners do? There is not one [illegible] Words that we are able to keep. This [illegible] to show us not our strength, but our [illegible] our eyes both back to what [illegible] what we could have done; and upwards [illegible] in whom we can do it. He [illegible] that misconstrues these thy com- [illegible] of the same nature with those of the [illegible] requiring the brick, and not giving the [illegible] us do what we cannot, thou enablest us to do [illegible] The precepts under the Gospel have not only [illegible] but an habilitation of thy power: as [illegible] disciples to give to the multitude, [illegible] [illegible] thou commandedst to give. [illegible] hath what he would, an acknowledgment of [illegible] *We have here but five loaves and two fis*[illegible] the family of the Lord of the wh[illegible] fishes, and those litt[illegible]

We well know, O Saviour, that the beasts were thine on a thousand mountains; all the corn thine that covered the whole surface of the earth; all the fowls of the air thine: it was thou that providedst those drifts of quails that fell among the tents of thy rebellious Israelites; that rainedst down those showers of manna round about their camp; and dost thou take up for thyself and thy meiny with *five barley loaves and two little fishes?* Certainly, this was thy will, not thy need; to teach us that this body must be fed, not pampered. Our *belly* may not be our master, much less our *god;* or if it be, the next word is, *whose glory is their shame, whose end damnation.*

It is noted as the crime of the rich glutton, that *he fared deliciously every day.* I never find that Christ entertained any guests but twice, and that was only with loaves and fishes. I find him sometimes feasted by others more liberally. But his domestical fare, how simple, how homely it is! The end of food is to sustain nature. Meat was ordained for the belly; the belly for the body; the body for the soul; the soul for God: we must still look through the subordinate ends to the highest. To rest in the pleasure of the meat is for those creatures which have no souls.

O the extreme delicacy of these times! What conquisition is here of all sorts of curious dishes from the farthest seas and lands, to make up one hour's meal! what broken cookery! what devised mixtures! what nice sauces! what feasting, not of the taste only, but of the scent! Are we the disciples of Him that took up with the loaves and fishes; or the scholars of a Philoxenus, or an Apicius, or Vitellius, or those other monsters of the palate? the true sons of those first parents that killed themselves with their teeth?

Neither was the quality of these victuals more coarse than the quantity small. They make a *but* of five loaves and two fishes; and well might, in respect of so many thousand mouths. A little food to an hungry stomach doth rather stir up appetite than satisfy it; as a little rain upon a droughty soil doth rather help to scorch than refresh it. When we look with the eye of sense or reason upon any object, we shall see an impossibility of those effects which faith can easily apprehend, and divine power more easily produce. Carnal minds are ready to measure all our hopes by human possibilities, and when they fail, to despair of success; where true faith measures them by divine power, and therefore

can never be disheartened. This grace is for things not seen, and whether beyond hope or against it.

The virtue is not in the means but in the agent; *Bring them hither to me.* How much more easy had it been for our Saviour to fetch the loaves to him than to multiply them! The hands of the disciples shall bring them, that they might more fully witness both the Author and manner of the instant miracle. Had the loaves and fishes been multiplied without this bringing, perhaps they might have seemed to have come by the secret provision of the guests; now there can be no question either of the act or of the agent. As God takes pleasure in doing wonders for men, so he loves to be acknowledged in the great works that he doth. He hath no reason to part with his own glory, that is too precious for him to lose, or for his creature to embezzle. And how justly didst thou, O Saviour, in this, mean to teach thy disciples that it was thou only who feedest the world, and upon whom both themselves and all their fellow creatures must depend for their nourishment and provision; and that if it came not through thy hands it could not come to theirs.

There need no more words. I do not hear the disciples stand upon the terms of their own necessity; "Alas! Sir, it is too little for ourselves; whence shall we then relieve our own hunger? give leave to our charity to begin at home:" but they willingly yield to the command of their Master, and put themselves upon his providence for the sequel. When we have a charge from God, it is not for us to stand upon self-respects. In this case there is no such sure liberty as in a self-contempt. O God, when thou callest to us for our five loaves we must forget our own interest: otherwise, if we be more thrifty than obedient, our good turns evil; and much better had it been for us to have wanted that which we withhold from the owner.

He that is the Master of the feast marshals the guests; *He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass.* They obey, and expect. O marvellous faith! So many thousands sit down and address themselves to a meal when they saw nothing but five poor barley loaves and two small fishes. None of them say, "Sit down? to what? Here are the mouths, but where is the meat? We can soon be set, but whence shall we be served? Ere we draw our knives let us see our cheer:" but they meekly and obediently dispose themselves to their places, and look up to Christ for a miraculous purveyance. It is for all that would be Christ's followers

to lead the life of faith; and even where means appear not, to wait upon that merciful hand. Nothing is more easy than to trust God when our barns and coffers are full, and to say, *Give us our daily bread* when we have it in our cupboard; but when we have nothing, when we know not how or whence to get any thing, then to depend upon an invisible bounty, this is a true and noble act of faith. To cast away our own, that we may immediately live upon Divine providence, I know no warrant; but when the necessity is of God's making we see our refuge, and happy are we if our confidence can fly to it and rest in it. Yea, fulness should be a curse if it should debar us from this dependence. At our best we must look up to this great Householder of the world, and cannot but need his provision. If we have meat, perhaps not appetite; if appetite, it may be, not digestion; or if that, not health and freedom from pain; or if that, (perhaps from other occurrents,) not life.

The guests are set, full of expectation. He that could have multiplied the bread in absence, in silence takes it and blesses it, that he might at once show them the Author and the means of this increase. It is thy blessing, O God, that maketh rich. What a difference do we see in mens' estates! Some languish under great means, and enjoy not either their substance or themselves; others are cheerful and happy in a little. Second causes may not be denied their work, but the overruling power is above. The subordinateness of the creature doth not take away from the right, from the thank of the First Mover.

He could as well have multiplied the loaves whole, why would he rather do it in the breaking? Was it to teach us, that in the distribution of our goods we should expect his blessing, not in their entireness and reservation? *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth,* saith Solomon: yea, there is no man but increaseth by scattering. It is the grain thrown into the several furrows of the earth which yields the rich interest unto the husbandman: that which is tied up in his sack, or heaped in his granary, decreaseth by keeping. *He that soweth liberally shall reap liberally.*

Away with our weak distrust. If wealth came by us, giving were the way to want: now that God gives to the giver, nothing can so sure enrich us as our beneficence. He multiplied the bread, not to keep, but to give; *He gave it to the disciples.*

And why not rather by his own hand to the multitude, that so

the miracle and thank might have been more immediate? Wherefore was this, O Saviour, but that thou mightest win respect to thy disciples from the people? as great princes, when they would ingratiate a favourite, pass no suits but through his hands. What an honour was this to thy servants, that as thou wert Mediator betwixt thy Father and man, so thou wouldest have them, in some beneficial occasion, mediate betwixt men and thee! How fit a type is this of thy spiritual provision; that thou, who couldst have fed the world by thine immediate word, wouldst by the hands of thy ministers divide the bread of life to all hearers! like as it was with the Law: well did the Israelites see and hear that thou couldst deliver that dreadful message with thine own mouth; yet in favour of their weakness thou wouldst treat with them by a Moses.

Use of means derogates nothing from the efficacy of the principal agent, yea, adds to it. It is a strange weakness of our spiritual eyes if we can look but to the next hand. How absurd had these guests been, if they had termined the thanks in the servitors, and had said, "We have it from you; whence ye had it, is no part of our care: we owe this favour to you; if you owe it to your Master, acknowledge your obligations to him, as we do unto you!" But since they well knew that the disciples might have handled this bread long enough ere any such effect could have followed, they easily find to whom they are beholden. Our Christian wisdom must teach us, whosoever be the means, to reserve our main thanks for the Author of our good.

He gave the bread then to his disciples, not to eat, not to keep, but to distribute. It was not their particular benefit he regarded in this gift, but the good of many. In every feast, each servitor takes up his dish; not to carry it aside into a corner for his own private repast, but to set it before the guests for the honour of his Master: when they have done, his cheer begins. What shall we say to those injurious waiters who fatten themselves with those concealed messes which are meant to others? Their table is made their snare, and these stolen morsels cannot but end in bitterness.

Accordingly the disciples set this fare before the guests. I do not see so much as Judas reserve a share to himself, whether out of hunger or distrust. Had not our Saviour commanded so free a distribution, their self-love would easily have taught them where to begin. Nature says, "First thyself, then thy friends:" either

extremity or particular charge gives grace occasion to alter the case. Far be it from us to think we have any claim in that which the owner gives us merely to bestow.

I know not now whether more to wonder at the miraculous eating or the miraculous leaving. Here were a whole host of guests, five thousand men; and in all likelihood no fewer women and children. Perhaps some of these only looked on; nay, *they did all eat.* Perhaps every man a crumb, or a bit; nay, they did eat to satiety: *all were satisfied.* So many must needs make clean work; of so little there could be left nothing: yea, there were *fragments* remaining: perhaps some crumbs or crusts, hardly to be discerned, much less gathered; nay, *twelve baskets full:* more remained than was first set down. Had they eaten nothing, it was a just miracle that so much should be left; had nothing remained, it was no less miracle that so many had eaten and so many satisfied: but now, that so many bellies and so many baskets were filled, the miracle was doubled.

O work of a boundless omnipotency! Whether this were done by creation or by conversion uses to be questioned, but needs not. While Christ multiplies the bread, it is not for us to multiply his miracles. To make aught of nothing is more than to add much unto something: it was therefore rather by turning of a former matter into these substances, than by making these substances of nothing.

Howsoever, here is a marvellous provision made, a marvellous bounty of that provision; a no less marvellous extent of that bounty.

Those that depend upon God, and busy themselves in his work, shall not want a due purveyance in the very desert. Our strait and confined beneficence reaches so far as to provide for our own. Those of our domestics, which labour in our service, do but justly expect and challenge their diet; whereas day-labourers are oft-times at their own finding. How much more will that God who is infinite in mercy and power take order for the livelihood of those that attend him! We see the birds of the air provided for by him; how rarely have we found any of them dead of hunger! yet what do they but what they are carried unto by natural instinct? how much more, where, besides propriety [property], there is a rational and willing service! Shall the Israelites be fed with manna, Elijah by the ravens, the widow by her multiplied meal and oil, Christ's clients in the wilderness with loaves and fishes?

O God, while thou dost thus promerit us by thy providence, let not us wrong thee by distrust.

God's undertakings cannot but be exquisite. Those whom he professes to feed must needs have enough: the measure of his bounty cannot but run over. Doth he take upon him to prepare a table for his Israel in the desert? the bread shall be the food of angels; the flesh shall be the delicates of princes; manna and quails. Doth he take upon him to make wine for the marriage-feast of Cana? there shall be both store and choice; the vintage yields poor stuff to this. Will he feast his auditors in the wilderness? if they have not dainties, they shall have plenty; *They were all satisfied.* Neither yet, O Saviour, is thy hand closed. What abundance of heavenly doctrine dost thou set before us! how are we feasted, yea pampered with thy celestial delicacies! Not according to our meanness, but according to thy state, are we fed. Thrifty and niggardly collations are not for princes. We are full of thy goodness; O let our hearts run over with thanks.

I do gladly wonder at this miracle of thine, O Saviour; yet so as that I forget not mine own condition. Whence is it that we have our continual provision? One and the same munificent hand doth all. If the Israelites were fed with manna in the desert, and with corn in Canaan, both were done by the same power and bounty. If the disciples were fed by the loaves multiplied, and we by the grain multiplied, both are the act of one Omnipotence. What is this but a perpetual miracle, O God, which thou workest for our preservation? Without thee there is no more power in the grain to multiply than in the loaf: it is thou that *givest it a body at thy pleasure, even to every seed his own body;* it is thou that *givest fulness of bread and cleanness of teeth.* It is no reason thy goodness should be less magnified because it is universal.

One or two baskets could have held the five loaves and two fishes, not less than twelve can hold the remainders. The Divine munificence provides not for our necessity only, but for our abundance, yea superfluity. Envy and ignorance, while they make God the author of enough, are ready to impute the surplusage to another cause; as we commonly say of wine, that the liquor is God's, the excess Satan's.

Thy table, O Saviour, convinces them which had more taken away than set on. Thy blessing makes an estate not competent only but rich. I hear of barns full of plenty, and presses bursting out

with new wine, as the rewards of those that honour thee with their substance. I hear of heads anointed with oil, and cups running over. O God, as thou hast a free hand to give, so let us have a free heart to return thee the praise of thy bounty.

Those fragments were left behind. I do not see the people, when they had filled their bellies, cramming their pockets, or stuffing their wallets; yet the place was desert, and some of them doubtless had far home. It becomes true disciples to be content with the present, not too solicitous for the future. O Saviour, thou didst not bid us beg bread for to morrow, but for to day; not that we should refuse thy bounty when thou pleasest to give, but that we should not distrust thy providence for the need we may have.

Even these fragments, though but of barley loves and fishbones, may not be left in the desert, for the compost of that earth whereon they were increased; but, by our Saviour's holy and just command, are gathered up. The liberal Housekeeper of the world will not allow the loss of his orts. The children's bread may not be given to dogs, and if the crumbs fall to their share, it is because their smallness admits not of a collection.

If those who out of obedience or due thrift have thought to gather up crumbs have found them pearls, I wonder not; surely both are alike the good creatures of the same Maker, and both of them may prove equally costly to us in their wilful misspending.

But O what shall we say, that not crusts and crumbs, not loaves and dishes and cups, but whole patrimonies are idly lavished away; not merely lost, (this were more easy,) but ill spent in a wicked riot upon dice, drabs, drunkards? O the fearful account of these unthrifty bailiffs, which shall once be given in to our great Lord and Master, when he shall call us to a strict reckoning of all our talents! He was condemned that increased not the sum concredited to him; what shall become of him that lawlessly impairs it?

Who gathered up these fragments but the twelve apostles, every one his basket full? They were the servitors that set on this banquet at the command of Christ, they waited on the tables, they took away.

It was our Saviour's just care that those offals should not perish; but he well knew that a greater loss depended upon those scraps, a loss of glory to the Omnipotent Worker of that miracle.

The feeding of the multitude was but the one half of the work, the other half was in the remnant. Of all other, it most concerns the successors of the apostles to take care that the marvellous works of their God and Saviour may be improved to the best. They may not suffer a crust or crumb to be lost that may yield any glory to that Almighty Agent.

Here was not any morsel or bone that was not worthy to be a relic, every the least parcel whereof was no other than miraculous.

All the ancient monuments of God's supernatural power and mercy were in the keeping of Aaron and his sons. There is no servant in the family but should be thriftily careful for his master's profit; but most of all the steward, who is particularly charged with this oversight. Woe be to us if we care only to gather up our own scraps, with neglect of the precious morsels of our Maker and Redeemer.

THE WALK UPON THE WATERS.—Matthew xiv.

All elements are alike to their Maker. He that had well approved his power on the land will now show it in the air and the waters. He that had preserved the multitude from the peril of hunger in the desert will now preserve his disciples from the peril of the tempest in the sea.

Where do we ever else find any compulsion offered by Christ to his disciples? He was like the good Centurion, he *said to one, Go, and he goeth.* When he did but call them from their nets, they came, and when he sent them by pairs into the cities and country of Judea to preach the gospel, they went. There was never errand whereon they went unwillingly; only now he constrained them to depart. We may easily conceive how loath they were to leave him, whether out of love or of common civility. Peter's tongue did but (when it was) speak the heart of the rest; *Master, thou knowest that I love thee.* Who could choose but be in love with such a Master? and who can willingly part from what he loves? But had the respects been only common and ordinary, how unfit might it seem to leave a Master now towards night, in a wild place amongst strangers, unprovided of the means of his passage! Where otherwise therefore he needed but to bid, now he constrains.

O Saviour, it was ever thy manner to call all men unto thee;

Come to me, all that labour and are heavy laden. When didst thou ever drive any one from thee? Neither had it been so now, but to draw them closer unto thee whom thou seemedst for the time to abdicate.

In the mean while, I know not whether more to excuse their unwillingness or to applaud their obedience. As it shall be fully above, so it was proportionally here below; *In thy presence,* O Saviour, *is the fulness of joy.* Once, when thou askedst these thy domestics whether they also would depart, it was answered thee by one tongue for all, *Master, whither should we go from thee? thou hast the words of eternal life.* What a death was it then to them to be compelled to leave thee! Sometimes it pleaseth the Divine goodness to lay upon his servants such commands as savour of harshness and discomfort, which yet, both in his intention and in the event, are no other than gracious and sovereign. The more difficulty was in the charge, the more praise was in the obedience. I do not hear them stand upon the terms of capitulation with their Master, nor pleading importunately for their stay, but instantly upon the command they yield and go. We are never perfect disciples till we can depart from our reason, from our will; yea, O Saviour, when thou biddest us, from thyself.

Neither will the multitude be gone without a dismission. They had followed him while they were hungry, they will not leave him now they are fed. Fain would they put that honour upon him which to avoid he is fain to avoid them. Gladly would they pay a kingdom to him as their shot for their late banquet; he shuns both it and them. O Saviour, when the hour of thy passion was now come, thou couldst offer thyself readily to thine apprehenders; and now, when the glory of the world presses upon thee, thou runnest away from a crown. Was it to teach us that there is less danger in suffering than in outward prosperity? What do we dote upon that worldly honour which thou heldest worthy of avoidance and contempt!

Besides this reservedness, it was devotion that drew Jesus aside. He went alone up to the mountain to pray. Lo, thou to whom the greatest throng was a solitude in respect of the fruition of thy Father, thou who wert uncapable of distraction from him with whom thou wert one, wouldst yet so much act man as to retire for the opportunity of prayer; to teach us, who are nothing but wild thoughts and giddy distractedness, to go aside when

we would speak with God. How happy is it for us that thou prayedst? O Saviour, thou prayedst for us, who have not grace enough to pray for ourselves; not worth enough to be accepted when we do pray. Thy prayers, which were most perfect and impetrative, are they by which our weak and unworthy prayers receive both life and favour. And now, how assiduous should we be in our supplications, who are empty of grace, full of wants; when thou, who wert a God of all power, prayedst for that which thou couldst command! Therefore do we pray because thou prayedst; therefore do we expect to be graciously answered in our prayers, because thou didst pray for us here on earth, and now intercedest for us in heaven.

The evening was come. The disciples looked long for their Master, and loath they were to have stirred without him; but his command is more than the strongest wind to fill their sails, and they are now gone.

Their expectation made not the evening seem so long as our Saviour's devotion made it seem short to him.

He is on the mount, they on the sea; yet while he was in the mount praying and lifting up his eyes to his Father, he fails not to cast them about upon his disciples tossed on the waves. Those all-seeing eyes admit of no limits. At once he sees the highest heavens and the midst of the sea, the glory of his Father and the misery of his disciples. Whatever prospects present themselves to his view, the distress of his followers is ever most noted. How much more dost thou now, O Saviour, from the height of thy glorious advancement, behold us thy wretched servants tossed on the unquiet sea of this world, and beaten with the troublesome and threatening billows of affliction!

Thou forcsawest their toil and danger ere thou dismissedst them, and purposely sendedst them away, that they might be tossed. Thou, that couldest prevent our sufferings by thy power, wilt permit them in thy wisdom, that thou mayest glorify thy mercy in our deliverance, and confirm our faith by the issue of our distresses.

How do all things now seem to conspire to the vexing of the poor disciples! The night was sullen and dark, their Master was absent, the sea was boisterous, the winds were high and contrary. Had their Master been with them, howsoever the elements had raged, they had been secure; had their Master been away, yet, if the sea had been quiet, or the winds fair, the passage might have

been endured: now both season, and sea, and wind, and their Master's desertion, had agreed to render them perfectly miserable. Sometimes the providence of God hath thought good so to order it, that to his best servants there appeareth no glimpse of comfort, but so absolute vexation, as if heaven and earth had plotted their full affliction. Yea, O Saviour, what a dead night, what a fearful tempest, what an astonishing dereliction was that, wherein thou thyself criedst out in the bitterness of thine anguished soul, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Yet in all these extremities of misery our gracious God intends nothing but his greater glory and ours, the triumph of our faith, the crown of our victory.

All that longsome and tempestuous night must the disciples wear out in danger and horror, as given over to the winds and waves; but in the fourth watch of the night, when they were wearied out with toils and fears, comes deliverance. At their entrance into the ship, at the arising of the tempest, at the shutting in of the evening, there was no news of Christ; but when they had been all the night long beaten, not so much with storms and waves as with their own thoughts, now in the fourth watch (which was near to the morning) Jesus came unto them, and purposely not till then; that he might exercise their patience; that he might inure them to wait upon Divine providence, in cases of extremity; that their devotions might be more whetted by delay; that they might give gladder welcome to their deliverance. O God, thus thou thinkest fit to do still. We are by turns in our sea, the winds bluster, the billows swell, the night and thy absence heighten our discomfort, thy time and ours is set; as yet it is but midnight with us; can we but hold out patiently till the fourth watch, thou wilt surely come and rescue us. O let us not faint under our sorrows, but wear out our three watches of tribulation with undaunted patience and holy resolution.

O Saviour, our extremities are the seasons of thine aid. Thou camest at last; but yet so as that there was more dread than joy in thy presence. Thy coming was both miraculous and frightful.

Thou, God of elements, passedst through the air, walkedst upon the waters. Whether thou meantest to terminate this miracle in thy body, or in the waves which thou troddest upon; whether so lightening the one that it should make no impression in the liquid waters, or whether so consolidating the other that the pavemented waves yielded a firm causeway to thy sacred feet

to walk on, I neither determine nor inquire; thy silence ruleth mine; thy power was in either miraculous; neither know I in whether to adore it more.

But withal give me leave to wonder more at thy passage than at thy coming. Wherefore camest thou, but to comfort them? and wherefore then wouldest thou pass by them, as if thou hadst intended nothing but their dismay? Thine absence could not be so grievous as thy preterition; that might seem justly occasioned, this could not but seem willingly neglective. Our last conflicts have wont ever to be the sorest: as when, after some dripping rain, it pours down most vehemently, we think the weather is changing to serenity.

O Saviour, we may not always measure thy meaning by thy semblance; sometimes, what thou most intendest thou showest least. In our afflictions thou turnest thy back upon us; and hidest thy face from us when thou most mindest our distresses. So Jonathan shot the arrows beyond David, when he meant them to him. So Joseph calls for Benjamin into bonds, when his heart was bound to him in the strongest affection. So the tender mother makes as if she would give away her crying child, whom she hugs so much closer in her bosom. If thou pass by us while we are struggling with the tempest, we know it is not for want of mercy. Thou canst not neglect us; O let not us distrust thee.

What object should have been so pleasing to the eyes of the disciples as their Master; and so much the more, as he showed his Divine power in this miraculous walk? But lo, contrarily, *they are troubled;* not with his presence, but with this form of presence. The supernatural works of God, when we look upon them with our own eyes, are subject to a dangerous misprision. The very sunbeams to which we are beholden for our sight, if we eye them directly, blind us. Miserable men! we are ready to suspect truths, to run away from our safety, to be afraid of our comforts, to misknow our best friends.

And why are they thus troubled? *They had thought they had seen a spirit.* That there have been such apparitions of spirits, both good and evil, hath ever been a truth undoubtedly received of Pagans, Jews, Christians; although, in the blind times of superstition, there was much collusion mixed with some verities: crafty men and lying spirits agreed to abuse the credulous world. But even where there was not truth, yet there was horror. The

very good angels were not seen without much fear; their sight was construed to bode death: how much more the evil, which in their very nature are harmful and pernicious! We see not a snake or a toad, without some recoiling of blood and sensible reluctation, although those creatures run away from us; how much more must our hairs stand upright and our senses boggle at the sight of a spirit, whose both nature and will is contrary to ours, and professedly bent to our hurt!

But say it had been what they mistook it for, a spirit; why should they fear? Had they well considered, they had soon found that evil spirits are nevertheless present when they are not seen, and nevertheless harmful or malicious when they are present unseen. Visibility adds nothing to their spite or mischief. And could their eyes have been opened, they had, with Elisha's servant, seen *more with* them *than against* them; a sure, though invisible guard of more powerful spirits, and themselves under the protection of the God of spirits: so as they might have bidden a bold defiance to all the powers of darkness. But partly, their faith was yet but in the bud; and partly, the presentation of this dreadful object was sudden, and without the respite of a recollection and settlement of their thoughts.

O the weakness of our frail nature, who in the want of faith are affrighted with the visible appearance of those adversaries whom we profess daily to resist and vanquish, and with whom we know the decree of God hath matched us in an everlasting conflict! Are not these they that ejected devils by their command? Are not these of them that could say, *Master, the evil spirits are subdued to us!* yet now, when they see but an imagined spirit, they fear. What power there is in the eye to betray the heart! While Goliath was mingled with the rest of the Philistine host, Israel camped boldly against them; but when that giant stalks out single between the two armies, and fills and amazes their eyes with his hideous stature, now they run away for fear. Behold, we are committed with legions of evil spirits and complain not; let but one of them give us some visible token of his presence, we shriek and tremble, and are not ourselves.

Neither is our weakness more conspicuous than thy mercy, O God, in restraining these spiritual enemies from these dreadful and ghastly representations of themselves to our eyes. Might those infernal spirits have liberty to appear how and when and to whom they would, certainly not many would be left in their

wits or in their lives. It is thy power and goodness to frail mankind that they are kept in their chains, and reserved in the darkness of their own spiritual being, that we may both oppugn and subdue them unseen.

But O the deplorable condition of reprobate souls! If but the imagined sight of one of these spirits of darkness can so daunt the heart of those which are free from their power, what a terror shall it be to live perpetually in the sight, yea under the torture of thousands of legions, of millions of devils! O the madness of wilful sinners, that will needs run themselves headily into so dreadful a damnation!

It was high time for our Saviour to speak. What with the tempest, what with the apparition, the disciples were almost lost with fear. How seasonable are his gracious redresses! Till they were thus affrighted, he would not speak; when they were thus affrighted, he would not hold his peace.

If his presence were fearful, yet his word was comfortable; *Be of good cheer, it is I:* yea, it is his word only which must make his presence both known and comfortable. He was present before; they mistook him and feared: there needs no other erection of their drooping hearts but, *It is I.* It is cordial enough to us in the worst of our afflictions to be assured of Christ's presence with us. Say but, *It is I,* O Saviour, and let evils do their worst; thou needest not say any more. Thy voice was evidence enough; so well were thy disciples acquainted with the tongue of thee their Master, that *It is I* was as much as an hundred names. Thou art the Good Shepherd: we are not of thy flock if we know thee not by thy voice from a thousand. Even this one is a great word, yea an ample style, *It is I.* The same tongue that said to Moses, *I AM hath sent thee,* saith now to the disciples, "*It is I;* I, your Lord and Master; I, the commander of winds and waters; I, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth; I, the God of spirits." Let heaven be but as one scroll, and let it be written all over with titles, they cannot express more than *It is I.* O sweet and seasonable word of a gracious Saviour, able to calm all tempests, able to revive all hearts! Say but so to my soul, and, in spite of hell, I am safe.

No sooner hath Jesus said, *I,* than Peter answers, *Master.* He can instantly name him that did not name himself. Every little hint is enough to faith. The Church sees her Beloved as well through the lattice as through the open window.

Which of all the followers of Christ gave so pregnant testimonies upon all occasions of his faith, of his love to his Master, as Peter? The rest were silent, while he both owned his Master, and craved access to him in that liquid way.

Yet what a sensible mixture is here of faith and distrust! It was faith that said, *Master;* it was distrust, as some have construed it, that said, *If it be thou.* It was faith that said, *Bid me come to thee,* implying that his word could as well enable as command; it was faith that durst step down upon that watery pavement: it was distrust, that upon the sight of a mighty wind feared. It was faith, that he walked; it was distrust, that he sunk; it was faith that said, *Lord, save me.*

O the imperfect composition of the best saint upon earth; as far from pure faith as from mere infidelity! If there be pure earth in the centre, all upward is mixed with the other elements; contrarily, pure grace is above, in the glorified spirits; all below is mixed with infirmity, with corruption. Our best is but as the air, which never was, never can be, at once fully enlightened; neither is there in the same region one constant state of light. It shall once be noon with us, when we shall have nothing but bright beams of glory; now it is but the dawning, wherein it is hard to say whether there be more light than darkness. We are now fair as the moon, which hath some spots in her greatest beauty; we shall be pure as the sun, whose face is all bright and glorious. Ever since the time that Adam set his tooth in the apple, till our mouth be full of mould, it never was, it never can be, other with us. Far be it from us to settle willingly upon the dregs of our infidelity; far be it from us to be disheartened with the sense of our defects and imperfections: *We believe; Lord, help our unbelief.*

While I find some disputing the lawfulness of Peter's suit; others quarrelling his *If it be thou;* let me be taken up with the wonder at the faith, the fervour, the heroical valour of this prime apostle, that durst say, *Bid me come to thee upon the waters.* He might have suspected that the voice of his Master might have been as easily imitated by that imagined spirit as his person; he might have feared the blustering tempest, the threatening billows, the yielding nature of that devouring element: but, as despising all these thoughts of misdoubt, such is his desire to be near his Master, that he says, *Bid me come to thee upon the waters.* He says not, "Come thou to me;" this had been

Christ's act, and not his: neither doth he say, "Let me come to thee;" this had been his act, and not Christ's: neither doth he say, "Pray that I may come to thee," as if this act had been out of the power of either: but, "*Bid me come to thee.* I know thou canst command both the waves and me; me to be so light that I shall not bruise the moist surface of the waves; the waves to be so solid, that they shall not yield to my weight. *All things obey thee: bid me come to thee upon the waters.*"

It was a bold spirit that could wish it; more bold that could act it. No sooner hath our Saviour said, *Come*, than he sets his foot upon the unquiet sea, not fearing either the softness or the roughness of that uncouth passage. We are wont to wonder at the courage of that daring man who first committed himself to the sea in a frail bark, though he had the strength of an oaken plank to secure him; how valiant must we needs grant him to be, that durst set his foot upon the bare sea, and shift his paces! Well did Peter know, that he who bade him could uphold him; and therefore he both sues to be bidden, and ventures to be upholden. True faith tasks itself with difficulties, neither can be dismayed with the conceits of ordinary impossibilities. It is not the scattering of straws or casting of molehills whereby the virtue of it is described, but removing of mountains. Like some courageous leader, it desires the honour of a danger, and sues for the first onset; whereas the worldly heart freezes in a lazy or cowardly fear, and only casts for safety and ease.

Peter sues; Jesus bids. Rather will he work miracles than disappoint the suit of a faithful man. How easily might our Saviour have turned over this strange request of his bold disciple, and have said, "What my Omnipotence can do is no rule for thy weakness? It is no less than presumption in a mere man to hope to imitate the miraculous works of God and man. Stay thou in the ship, and wonder; contenting thyself in this, that thou hast a Master to whom the land and water is alike." Yet I hear not a check, but a call; *Come.* The suit of ambition is suddenly quashed in the mother of the Zebedees: the suits of revenge prove no better in the mouth of the two fiery disciples: but a suit of faith, though high and seemingly unfit for us, he hath no power to deny. How much less, O Saviour, wilt thou stick at those things which lie in the very road of our Christianity! Never man said, "Bid me to come to thee in the way of thy commandments," whom thou didst not both bid and enable to come.

True faith rests not in great and good desires, but acts and executes accordingly. Peter doth not wish to go, and yet stand still; but his foot answers his tongue, and instantly chops down upon the waters. To sit still and wish is for sluggish and cowardly spirits. Formal volitions, yea velleities of good, while we will not so much as step out of the ship of our nature to walk unto Christ, are but the faint motions of vain hypocrisy. It will be long enough ere the gale of good wishes can carry us to our haven. *Ease slayeth the foolish.* O Saviour, we have thy command to come to thee out of the ship of our natural corruption: let no sea affray us, let no tempest of temptation withhold us. No way can be but safe when thou art the end.

Lo, Peter is walking upon the waves: two hands uphold him; the hand of Christ's power, the hand of his own faith; neither of them would do it alone. The hand of Christ's power laid hold on him; the hand of his faith laid hold on the power of Christ commanding. Had not Christ's hand been powerful, that faith had been in vain: had not that faith of his strongly fixed upon Christ, that power had not been effectual to his preservation. While we are here in the world, we walk upon the waters; still the same hands bear us up. If he let go his hold of us, we drown; if we let go our hold of him, we sink and shriek, as Peter did here, who, *when he saw the wind boisterous, was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

When he wished to be bidden to walk unto Christ he thought of the waters; *Bid me to come to thee on the waters*: he thought not of the winds which raged on those waters; or if he thought of a stiff gale, yet that tempestuous and sudden gust was out of his account and expectation. Those evils that we are prepared for have not such power over us as those that surprise us. A good waterman sees a dangerous billow coming towards him, and cuts it, and mounts over it with ease; the unheedy is overwhelmed. O Saviour, let my haste to thee be zealous, but not improvident: ere I set my foot out of the ship, let me foresee the tempest: when I have cast the worst, I cannot either miscarry or complain.

So soon as he began to fear, he began to sink. While he believed, the sea was brass; when once he began to distrust, those waves were water. He cannot sink while he trusts the power of his Master, he cannot but sink when he misdoubts it. Our

faith gives us, as courage and boldness, so success too; our infidelity lays us open to all dangers, to all mischiefs.

It was Peter's improvidence, not to foresee; it was his weakness, to fear; it was the effect of his fear, to sink; it was his faith that recollects itself and breaks through his infidelity, and in sinking could say, *Lord, save me.* His foot could not be so swift in sinking, as his heart in imploring: he knew who could uphold him from sinking, and, being sunk, deliver him; and therefore he says, *Lord, save me.*

It is a notable both sign and effect of true faith in sudden extremities to ejaculate holy desires, and, with the wings of our first thoughts, to fly up instantly to the throne of grace for present succour. Upon deliberation, it is possible for a man that hath been careless and profane, by good means to be drawn to holy dispositions; but, on the sudden, a man will appear as he is: whatever is most rife in the heart will come forth at the mouth. It is good to observe how our surprisals find us: the rest is but forced; this is natural: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* O Saviour, no evil can be swifter than my thought: my thought shall be upon thee ere I can be seized upon by the speediest mischief: at least, if I overrun not evils, I shall overtake them.

It was Christ his Lord whom Peter had offended in distrusting; it is Christ his Lord to whom he sues for deliverance. His weakness doth not discourage him from his refuge. O God, when we have displeased thee, when we have sunk in thy displeasure, whither should we fly for aid, but to thee whom we have provoked? Against thee only is our sin; in thee only is our help. In vain shall all the powers of heaven and earth conspire to relieve us, if thou withhold from our succour. As we offend thy justice daily by our sins, so let us continually rely upon thy mercy by the strength of our faith: *Lord, save us.*

The mercy of Christ is at once sought and found; *Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him.* He doth not say, "Hadst thou trusted me I would have safely preserved thee; but since thou wilt needs wrong my power and care with a cowardly diffidence, sink and drown;" but rather, as pitying the infirmity of his fearful disciple, he puts out the hand for his relief. That hand hath been stretched forth for the aid of many a one that hath never asked it; never any asked it to whose succour it hath

not been stretched. With what speed, with what confidence should we fly to that sovereign bounty from which never any suitor was sent away empty!

Jesus gave Peter his hand; but withal he gave him a check: *O thou of little faith, why doubtedst thou?* As Peter's faith was not pure, but mixed with some distrust; so our Saviour's help was not clear and absolute, but mixed with some reproof. A reproof wherein there was both a censure and an expostulation; a censure of his faith, an expostulation for his doubt: both of them sore and heavy.

By how much more excellent and useful a grace faith is, by so much more shameful is the defect of it; and by how much more reason here was of confidence, by so much more blameworthy was the doubt. Now Peter had a double reason of his confidence; the command of Christ, the power of Christ: the one in bidding him to come, the other in sustaining him while he came. To misdoubt him whose will he knew, whose power he felt, was well worth a reprehension.

When I saw Peter stepping forth upon the waters, I could not but wonder at his great faith; yet behold, ere he can have measured many paces, the Judge of hearts taxes him for little faith. Our mountains are but motes to God. Would my heart have served me to dare the doing of this that Peter did? Durst I have set my foot where he did? O Saviour, if thou foundest cause to censure the weakness and poverty of his faith, what mayest thou well say to mine? They mistake that think thou wilt take up with any thing. Thou lookest for firmitude and vigour in those graces which thou wilt allow in thy best disciples no less than truth.

The first steps were confident; there was fear in the next. O the sudden alteration of our affections, of our dispositions! One pace varies our spiritual condition. What hold is there of so fickle creatures, if we be left never so little to ourselves? As this lower world, wherein we are, is the region of mutability; so are we, the living pieces of it, subject to a perpetual change. It is for the blessed saints and angels above to be fixed in good. While we are here, there can be no constancy expected from us but in variableness.

As well as our Saviour loves Peter, yet he chides him. It is the fruit of his favour and mercy that we escape judgment, not that we escape reproof. Had not Peter found grace with his

Master, he had been suffered to sink in silence; now he is saved with a check. There may be more love in frowns than in smiles: *whom he loves he chastises.* What is chiding but a verbal castigation? and what is chastisement but a real chiding? *Correct me, O Lord,* yet *in thy judgment, not in thy fury. O let the righteous* God *smite me,* when I offend, with his gracious reproofs; these *shall be a precious oil, that shall not break my head.*

THE BLOODY ISSUE HEALED.

Matthew ix; Luke viii.

The time was, O Saviour, when a worthy woman offered to touch thee and was forbidden; now a meaner touches thee with approbation and encouragement. Yet as there was much difference in that body of thine which was the object of that touch, (being now mortal and passible, then impassible and immortal,) so there was in the agents; this a stranger, that a familiar; this obscure, that famous.

The same actions vary with time and other circumstances, and accordingly receive their dislike or allowance.

Doubtless thou hadst herein no small respect to the faith of Jairus, unto whose house thou wert going. That good man had but one only daughter, which lay sick in the beginning of his suit; ere the end, lay dead. While she lived, his hope lived; her death disheartened it. It was a great work that thou meantest to do for him; it was a great word that thou saidst to him, *Fear not, believe, and she shall be made whole.* To make this good, by the touch of the verge of thy garment thou revivedst one from the verge of death. How must Jairus needs now think, "He who by the virtue of his garment can pull this woman out of the paws of death, which hath been twelve years dying, can as well by the power of his word pull my daughter, who hath been twelve years living, out of the jaws of death, which hath newly seized on her!" It was fit the good Ruler should be raised up with this handsel of thy Divine power, whom he came to solicit.

That thou mightest lose no time, thou curedst in thy passage. The sun stands not still to give his influences, but diffuses them in his ordinary motion. How shall we imitate thee, if we suffer our hands to be out of use with good? Our life goes away with our time. We lose that which we improve not.

The patient laboured of an issue of blood; a disease that had

not more pain than shame, nor more natural infirmity than legal impurity.

Time added to her grief: twelve long years had she languished under this woful complaint. Besides the tediousness, diseases must needs get head by continuance; and so much more both weaken nature and strengthen themselves, by how much longer they afflict us. So it is in the soul, so in the state; vices which are the sicknesses of both, when they grow inveterate have a strong plea for their abode and uncontrollableness.

Yet more, to mend the matter, poverty, which is another disease, was superadded to her sickness: *she had spent all she had upon physicians.* While she had wherewith to make much of herself, and to procure good tendance, choice diet, and all the succours of a distressed languishment, she could not but find some mitigation of her sorrow; but now want began to pinch her no less than her distemper, and helped to make her perfectly miserable.

Yet could she have parted from her substance with ease, her complaint had been the less. Could the physicians have given her, if not health, yet relaxation and painlessness, her means had not been misbestowed; but now, *she suffered many things from them:* many an unpleasing potion, many tormenting incisions and divulsions, did she endure from their hands; the remedy was equal in trouble to the disease.

Yet had the cost and pain been never so great, could she have hereby purchased health, the match had been happy; all the world were no price for this commodity: but alas! her estate was the worse, her body not the better; her money was wasted, not her disease. Art could give her neither cure nor hope. It were injurious to blame that noble science for that it always speeds not. Notwithstanding all those sovereign remedies, men must, in their times, sicken and die. Even the miraculous gifts of healing could not preserve the owners from disease and dissolution.

It were pity but that this woman should have been thus sick; the nature, the durableness, cost, pain, incurableness of her disease, both sent her to seek Christ and moved Christ to her cure. Our extremities drive us to our Saviour; his love draws him to be most present and helpful to our extremities. When we are forsaken of all succours and hopes, we are fittest for his redress. Never are we nearer to help than when we despair of help: there is no fear, no danger, but in our own insensibleness.

This woman was a stranger to Christ. It seems she had never seen him. The report of his miracles had lifted her up to such a confidence of his power and mercy, as that she said in herself, *If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole.* The shame of her disease stopped her mouth from any verbal suit. Had she been acknown of her infirmity, she had been shunned and abhorred, and disdainfully put back of all the beholders; as doubtless where she was known, the law forced her to live apart: now she conceals both her grief and her desire and her faith; and only speaks where she may be bold, within herself, *If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole.*

I seek not mysteries in the virtue of the hem rather than of the garment. Indeed it was God's command to Israel, that they should be marked, not only in their skin, but in their clothes too. Those fringes and ribands upon the borders of their garments were for holy memorials of their duty and God's law: but that hence she supposed to find more virtue and sanctity in the touch of the hem than of the coat, I neither dispute nor believe. It was the site, not the signification, that she intimated; not as of the best part, but the utmost. In all likelihood, if there could have been virtue in the garment, the nearer to the body the more. Here was then the praise of this woman's faith, that she promiseth herself cure by the touch of the utmost hem. Whosoever would look to receive any benefit from Christ must come in faith: it is that only which makes us capable of any favour. Satan, the common ape of the Almighty, imitates him also in this point: all his charms and spells are ineffectual without the faith of the user, of the receiver.

Yea, the endeavour and issue of all, both human and spiritual things, depends upon our faith. Who would commit a plant or a seed to the earth, if he did not believe to have it nursed in that kindly bosom? What merchant would put himself upon the guard of an inch-board in a furious sea, if he did not trust to the faithful custody of that plank? Who would trade, or travel, or war, or marry, if he did not therein surely trust he should speed well? What benefit can we look to carry from a Divine exhortation, if we do not believe it will edify us? from a sacramental banquet, the food of angels, if we do not believe it will nourish our souls? from our best devotions, if we do not persuade ourselves they will fetch down blessings? O our vain and heartless services! if we do not say, "May I drink but one drop of that heavenly nectar, may

I taste but one crumb of that bread of life, may I hear but one word from the mouth of Christ, may I send up but one hearty sigh or ejaculation of an holy desire to my God, I shall be whole."

According to her resolution is her practice. She touched, but she came behind to touch; whether for humility, or her secrecy rather, as desiring to steal a cure unseen, unnoted.

She was a Jewess, and therefore well knew that her touch was in this case no better than a pollution; as hers, perhaps, but not of him; for on the one side necessity is under no positive law, on the other, the Son of God was not capable of impurity. Those, may be defiled with a touch that cannot heal with a touch; he that was above law is not comprised in the law. Be we never so unclean he may heal us, we cannot infect him. O Saviour, my soul is sick and foul enough with the spiritual impurities of sin: let me, by the hand of faith, lay hold but upon the hem of thy garment, (thy righteousness is thy garment,) it shall be both clean and whole.

Who would not think but a man might lade up a dish of water out of the sea unmissed? Yet that water, though much, is finite, those drops are within number; that art, which hath reckoned how many corns of sand would make up a world, could more easily compute how many drops of water would make up an ocean; whereas the mercies of God are absolutely infinite, and beyond all possibility of proportion; and yet this bashful soul cannot steal one drop of mercy from this endless, boundless, bottomless sea of Divine bounty, but it is felt and questioned; *and Jesus said, Who touched me?*

Who can now say that he is a poor man that reckons his store, when that God, who is rich in mercy, doth so? He knows all his own blessings, and keeps just tallies of our receipts; "Delivered so much honour to this man; to that so much wealth; so much knowledge to one; to another so much strength." How carefully frugal should we be in the notice, account, usage of God's several favours, since his bounty sets all his gifts upon the file! Even the worst servant in the gospel confessed his talents, though he employed them not. We are worse than the worst, if either we misknow, or dissemble, or forget them.

Who now can forbear the disciples' reply? "Who touched thee, O Lord? The multitude. Dost thou ask of one when thou art pressed by many? In the midst of a throng dost thou ask, *Who touched me?*"

"Yea, but yet *some one touched me:* all thronged me, but one touched me. How riddle-like soever it may seem to sound, they that thronged me touched me not, she only touched me that thronged me not, yea that touched me not." Even so, O Saviour, others touched thy body with theirs; she touched thy hem with her hand, thy Divine power with her soul.

Those two parts whereof we consist (the bodily, the spiritual) do in a sort partake of each other. The soul is the man, and hath those parts, senses, actions, which are challenged as proper to the body. This spiritual part hath both an hand and a touch, it is by the hand of faith that the soul toucheth; yea this alone both is and acts all the spiritual senses of that immaterial and divine part; this sees, hears, tasteth, toucheth God; and without this, the soul doth none of these. All the multitude then pressed Christ; he took not that for a touch since faith was away, only she touched him that believed to receive virtue by his touch. Outward fashionableness comes into no account with God, that is only done which the soul doth. It is no hoping that virtue should go forth from Christ to us, when no hearty desires go forth from us to him. He that is a Spirit looks to the deportment of that part which resembleth himself; as without it the body is dead, so, without the actions thereof, bodily devotions are but carcasses.

What reason had our Saviour to challenge this touch? *Somebody touched me.* The multitude in one extreme denied any touch at all; Peter, in another extreme, affirmed an over-touching of the multitude; betwixt both, he who felt it can say, *Somebody touched me.* Not *all,* as Peter; not *none,* as the multitude, but *somebody.* How then, O Saviour, how doth it appear that somebody touched thee? *For I perceive virtue is gone out from me.* The effect proves the act; virtue gone out evinces the touch. These two are in thee convertible; virtue cannot go out of thee but by a touch, and no touch can be of thee without virtue going out from thee. That which is a rule in nature, that "every agent works by a contact," holds spiritually too. Then dost thou, O God, work upon our souls, when thou touchest our hearts by thy Spirit; then do we react upon thee, when we touch thee by the hand of our faith and confidence in thee: and in both these virtue goes out from thee to us, yet goes not so out as that there is less in thee. In all bodily emanations, whose powers are but finite, it must needs follow, that the more is sent forth the less is reserved; but as it is in the sun, which gives us light, yet loseth none ever

the more, the luminosity of it being no whit impaired by that perpetual emission of lightsome beams, so much more is it in thee the Father of lights.

Virtue could not go out of thee without thy knowledge, without thy sending. Neither was it in a dislike or in a grudging exprobration that thou saidst, *Virtue is gone out from me.* Nothing could please thee better than to feel virtue fetched out from thee by the faith of the receiver. It is the nature and praise of good to be communicative. None of us would be other than liberal of our little, if we did not fear it would be lessened by imparting. Thou that knowest thy store so infinite, that participation doth only glorify and not diminish it, canst not but be more willing to give than we to receive. If we take but one drop of water from the sea, or one corn of sand from the shore, there is so much, though insensibly, less; but were we capable of worlds of virtue and benediction from that munificent hand, our enriching could no whit impoverish thee. Thou, which wert wont to hold it much *better to give than to receive*, canst not but give gladly. Fear not, O my soul, to lade plentifully at this well, this ocean of mercy, which the more thou takest overflows the more.

But why then, O Saviour, why didst thou thus inquire, thus expostulate? Was it for thy own sake; that the glory of the miracle might thus come to light, which otherwise had been smothered in silence? Was it for Jairus's sake, that his depressed heart might be raised to a confidence in thee, whose mighty power he saw proved by this cure, whose omniscience he saw proved by the knowledge of the cure? or was it chiefly for the woman's sake, for the praise of her faith, for the securing of her conscience?

It was within herself that she said, *If I may but touch:* none could hear this voice of the heart but he that made it. It was within herself that the cure was wrought, none of the beholders knew her complaint, much less her recovery; none noted her touch, none knew the occasion of her touch. What a pattern of powerful faith had we lost if our Saviour had not called this act to trial! As her modesty hid her disease, so it would have hid her virtue. Christ will not suffer this secrecy.

O the marvellous but free dispensation of Christ! One while he enjoins a silence to his recured patients, and is troubled with their divulgation of his favour; another while, as here, he will not lose the honour of a secret mercy, but fetches it out by his inquisition, by his profession; *Who hath touched me? for I perceive virtue*

is gone out from me. As we see in the great work of his creation, he hath placed some stars in the midst of heaven, where they may be most conspicuous: others he hath set in the southern obscurity, obvious to but few eyes; in the earth, he hath planted some flowers and trees in the famous gardens of the world; others, no less beautiful in untracked woods or wild deserts, where they are either not seen or not regarded.

O God, if thou have intended to glorify thyself by thy graces in us, thou wilt find means to fetch them forth into the notice of the world, otherwise our very privacy shall content us and praise thee.

Yet even this great faith wanted not some weakness. It was a poor conceit in this woman that she thought she might receive so sovereign a remedy from Christ without his heed, without his knowledge. Now that she might see she had trusted to a power which was not more bountiful than sensible, and whose goodness did not exceed his apprehension, but one that knew what he parted with, and willingly parted with that which he knew beneficial to so faithful a receiver, he can say, *Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive virtue is gone out from me.* As there was an error in her thought, so in our Saviour's words there was a correction. His mercy will not let her run away with that secret offence. It is a great favour of God to take us in the manner, and to shame our closeness. We scour off the rust from a weapon that we esteem, and prune the vine we care for. O God, do thou ever find me out in my sin, and do not pass over my least infirmities without a feeling controlment!

Neither doubt I, but that herein, O Saviour, thou didst graciously forecast the securing of the conscience of this faithful though overseen patient, which might well have afterwards raised some just scruples, for the filching of a cure, for unthankfulness to the Author of her cure; the continuance whereof she might have good reason to misdoubt, being surreptitiously gotten, ungratefully concealed. For prevention of all these dangers, and the full quieting of her troubled heart, how fitly, how mercifully didst thou bring forth this close business to the light, and clear it to the bottom! It is thy great mercy to foresee our perils, and to remove them ere we can apprehend the fear of them; as some skilful physician, who, perceiving a fever or phrensy coming, which the distempered patient little misdoubts, by seasonable applications anticipates that grievous malady, so as the sick man knows his safety ere he can suspect his danger.

Well might the woman think, "He who can thus cure, and thus know his cure, can as well know my name and descry md person, and shame and punish my ingratitude:" with a pale face, therefore, and a trembling foot, she comes and falls down before him, and humbly acknowledges what she had done, what she had obtained; *But the woman, finding she was not hid,* &c. Could she have perceived that she might have slily gone away with the cure, she had not confessed it; so had she made God a loser of glory, and herself an unthankful receiver of so great a benefit.

Might we have our own wills, we should be injurious both to God and ourselves. Nature lays such plots as would be sure to befool us, and is witty in nothing but deceiving herself. The only way to bring us home is, to find we are found, and to be convinced of the discovery of all our evasions; as some unskilful thief, that finds the owner's eye was upon him in his pilfering, lays down his stolen commodity with shame: contrarily, when a man is possessed with a conceit of secrecy and cleanly escape, he is emboldened in his lewdness. The adulterer chooses the twilight, and says, *No eye shall see me;* and joys in the sweetness of his stolen waters. O God, in the deepest darkness, in my most inward retiredness, when none sees me, when I see not myself, yet let me then see thine all-seeing eye upon me; and, if ever mine eyes shall be shut, or held with a prevailing temptation, check me with a speedy reproof, that with this abashed patient I may come in, and confess my error, and implore thy mercy.

It is no unusual thing for kindness to look sternly for the time, that it may endear itself more when it lists to be discovered. With a severe countenance did our Saviour look about him, and ask, *Who touched me?* When the woman comes in trembling, and confessing both her act and success, he clears up his brows, and speaks comfortably to her: *Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.* O sweet and seasonable word, fit for those merciful and divine lips; able to secure any heart, to dispel any fears! Still, O Saviour, thou doest thus to us: when we fall down before thee in an awful dejectedness, thou rearest us up with a cheerful and compassionate encouragement: when thou findest us bold and presumptuous, thou lovest to take us down; when humbled, it is enough to have prostrated us: like as that lion of Bethel worries the disobedient prophet, guards the poor ass that stood quaking before him; or, like some mighty wind, that bears over a tall elm or cedar with the same breath

that it raiseth a stooping reed; or, like some good physician, who finding the body obstructed and surcharged with ill humours, evacuates it, and when it is sufficiently pulled down, raises it up with sovereign cordials. And still do thou so to my soul. If at any time thou perceivest me stiff and rebellious, ready to face out my sin against thee, spare me not; let me smart, till I relent: but *a broken and contrite heart, thou wilt not, O Lord,* O Lord, do not *reject.*

It is only thy word which gives what it requires, comfort and confidence. Had any other shaken her by the shoulder, and cheered her up against those oppressive passions, it had been but waste wind. No voice but his who hath power to remit sin can secure the heart from the conscience of sin, from the pangs of conscience: *In the midst of the sorrows of my heart, thy comforts, O Lord,* thy comforts only, have power to *refresh my soul.*

Her cure was Christ's act, yet he gives the praise of it to her; *Thy faith hath made thee whole.* He had said before, *Virtue is gone out from me;* now, he acknowledges a virtue inherent in her. It was his virtue that cured her, yet he graciously casts this work upon her faith. Not that her faith did it by way of merit, by way of efficiency, but by way of impetration. So much did our Saviour regard that faith which he had wrought in her, that he will honour it with the success of her cure. Such, and the same, is still the remedy of our spiritual diseases, our sins: *By faith we are justified; by faith we are saved.* Thou only, O Saviour, canst heal us; thou wilt not heal us but by our faith; not as it issues from us, but as it appropriates thee. The sickness is ours, the remedy is ours: the sickness is our own by nature; the remedy ours by thy grace, both working and accepting it. Our faith is no less from thee than thy cure is from our faith.

O happy dismission, *Go in peace!* How unquiet had this poor soul formerly been! She had no outward peace with her neighbours; they shunned and abhorred her presence in this condition; yea, they must do so. She had no peace in body; that was pained and vexed with so long and foul a disease. Much less had she peace in her mind, which was grievously disquieted with sorrow for her sickness, with anger and discontentment at her torturing physicians, with fear of the continuance of so bad a guest. Her soul, for the present, had no peace, from the sense of her guiltiness in the carriage of this business; from the conceived displeasure of

Him to whom she came for comfort and redress. At once now doth our Saviour calm all these storms, and in one word and act restores to her peace with her neighbours, peace in herself; peace in body, in mind, in soul: *Go in peace.* Even so, Lord, it was for thee only, who art the Prince of Peace, to bestow thy peace where thou pleasest. Our body, mind, soul, estate is thine; whether to afflict or ease. It is a wonder if all of us do not ail somewhat. In vain shall we speak peace to ourselves, in vain shall the world speak peace to us, except thou say to us, as thou didst to this distressed soul, *Go in peace.*

JAIRUS AND HIS DAUGHTER.—Luke viii.

How troublesome did the people's importunity seem to Jairus! That great man came to sue unto Jesus for his dying daughter. The throng of the multitude intercepted him. Every man is most sensible of his own necessity. It is no straining courtesy in the challenge of our interest in Christ; there is no unmannerliness in our strife for the greatest share in his presence and benediction.

That only child of this ruler lay a dying when he came to solicit Christ's aid, and was dead while he solicited it. There was hope in her sickness; in her extremity there was fear; in her death, despair and impossibility, as they thought, of help: *Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.* When we have to do with a mere finite power, this word were but just. He was a prophet no less than a king that said, *While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.* But since thou hast to do with an omnipotent Agent, know now, O thou faithless messenger, that death can be no bar to his power. How well would it have become thee to have said, "*Thy daughter is dead;* but who can tell, whether thy God and Saviour will not be gracious to thee, that the child may revive? Cannot he, in whose hands are the issues of death, bring her back again?"

Here were more manners than faith; *Trouble not the Master.* Infidelity is all for ease, and thinks every good work tedious. That which nature accounts troublesome is pleasing and delightful

to grace. Is it any pain for an hungry man to eat? O Saviour, it was thy *meat and drink to do* thy *Father's will;* and his will was, that thou shouldest bear our griefs and take away our sorrows. It cannot be thy trouble, which is our happiness, that we may still sue to thee.

The messenger could not so whisper his ill news but Jesus heard it. Jairus hears that he feared; and was now heartless with so sad tidings. He that resolved not to trouble the Master meant to take so much more trouble to himself, and would now yield to a hopeless sorrow. He whose work it is to comfort the afflicted rouseth up the dejected heart of that pensive father: *Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

The word was not more cheerful than difficult. *Fear not!* Who can be insensible of so great an evil? Where death hath once seized, who can but doubt he will keep his hold? No less hard was it not to grieve for the loss of an only child, than not to fear the continuance of the cause of that grief.

In a perfect faith there is no fear; by how much more we fear, by so much less we believe. Well are these two then coupled, *Fear not, believe only.* O Saviour, if thou didst not command us somewhat beyond nature, it were no thank to us to obey thee. While the child was alive, to believe that it might recover, it was no hard task; but now that she was fully dead, to believe she should live again, was a work not easy for Jairus to apprehend, though easy for thee to effect; yet must that be believed, else there is no capacity of so great a mercy. As *love*, so faith *is stronger than death;* making those bonds no other than, as Samson did his withs, like threads of tow. How much natural impossibility is there in the return of these bodies from the dust of their earth, into which, through many degrees of corruption, they are at the last mouldered! Fear not, O my soul; believe only: it must, it shall be done.

The sum of Jairus's first suit was for the health, not for the resuscitation of his daughter; now that she was dead, he would, if he durst, have been glad to have asked her life. And now, behold, our Saviour bids him expect both her life and her health; *Thy daughter shall be made whole:* alive from her death; whole from her disease. Thou didst not, O Jairus, thou daredst not ask so much as thou receivest. How glad wouldest thou have been, since this last news, to have had thy daughter alive, though weak and sickly! Now thou shalt receive her, not living only,

but sound and vigorous. Thou dost not, O Saviour, measure thy gifts by our petitions, but by our wants and thine own mercies.

This work might have been as easily done by an absent command; the power of Christ was there, while himself was away: but he will go personally to the place, that he might be confessed the Author of so great a miracle.

O Saviour, thou lovest to go to the house of mourning: thy chief pleasure is the comfort of the afflicted.

What a confusion there is in worldly sorrow? The mother shrieks, the servants cry out, the people make lamentation, the minstrels howl, and strike dolefully; so as the ear might question whether the ditty or the instrument were more heavy. If ever expressions of sorrow sound well, it is when death leads the quire. Soon doth our Saviour charm this noise, and turns these unseasonable mourners, whether formal or serious, out of doors. Not that he dislikes music, whether to condole or comfort, but that he had life in his eye, and would have them know that he held these funeral ceremonies to be too early, and long before their time: *Give place; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.* Had she been dead, she had but slept; now she was not dead, but asleep, because he meant this nap of death should be so short, and her awakening so speedy. Death and sleep are alike to him, who can cast whom he will into the sleep of death, and awake when and whom he pleaseth out of that deadly sleep.

Before, the people and domestics of Jairus held Jesus for a prophet; now, they took him for a dreamer: *Not dead, but asleep!* They that came to mourn cannot now forbear to laugh. "Have we piped at so many funerals, and seen and lamented so many corpses, and cannot we distinguish betwixt sleep and death? The eyes are set, the breath is gone, the limbs are stiff and cold. Who ever died, if she do but sleep?" How easily may our reason or sense befool us in divine matters! Those that are competent judges in natural things are ready to laugh God to scorn, when he speaks beyond their compass, and are by him justly laughed to scorn for their unbelief. Vain and faithless men! as if that unlimited power of the Almighty could not make good his own word, and turn either sleep into death or death into sleep at pleasure. Ere many minutes they shall be ashamed of their error and incredulity.

There were witnesses enow of her death; there shall not be many of her restoring. Three choice disciples and the two parents

are only admitted to the view and testimony of this miraculous work. The eyes of those incredulous scoffers were not worthy of this honour. Our infidelity makes us incapable of the secret favours and the highest counsels of the Almighty.

What did these scorners think and say, when they saw him putting the minstrels and people out of doors! "Doubtless the maid is but asleep; the man fears lest the noise shall awake her; we must speak and tread softly that we disquiet her not. What will he and his disciples do the while? Is it not to be feared they will startle her out of her rest?" Those that are shut out from the participation of God's counsels think all his words and projects no better than foolishness.

But art thou, O Saviour, ever the more discouraged by the derision and censure of these scornful unbelievers? Because fools jeer thee, dost thou forbear thy work? Surely I do not perceive that thou heedest them, save for contempt, or carest more for their words than their silence. It is enough that thine act shall soon honour thee and convince them. *He took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise; and her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.*

How could that touch, that call, be other than effectual? He who made that hand touched it; and he who shall once say, *Arise, ye dead,* said now, *Maid, arise.* Death cannot but obey him who is the Lord of life. The soul is ever equally in his hand who is the God of spirits; it cannot but go and come at his command. When he says, *Maid, arise,* the now-dissolved spirit knows his office, his place, and instantly reassumes that room which by his appointment it had left.

O Saviour, if thou do but bid my soul to arise from the death of sin, it cannot lie still: if thou bid my body to arise from the grave, my soul cannot but glance down from her heaven and animate it. In vain shall my sin or my grave offer to withhold me from thee.

The maid revives: not now to languish for a time upon her sick bed, and by some faint degrees to gather an insensible strength, but at once she arises from her death and from her couch; at once she puts off her fever with her dissolution; she finds her life and her feet at once; at once she finds her feet and her stomach: *He commanded to give her meat.* Omnipotency doth not use to go the pace of nature. All God's immediate works are, like himself, perfect. He that raised her supernatu-

rally could have so fed her. It was never the purpose of his power to put ordinary means out of office.

THE MOTION OF THE TWO FIERY DISCIPLES REPELLED.—Luke ix.

The time drew on wherein Jesus must be received up. He must take death in his way. Calvary is in his passage to mount Olivet. He must be lift up to the cross, thence to climb into his heaven. Yet this comes not into mention; as if all the thought of *death* were *swallowed up* in this *victory* over death. Neither, O Saviour, is it otherwise with us the weak members of thy mystical body. We must die, we shall be glorified. What if death stand before us? we look beyond him at that transcendent glory. How should we be dismayed with that pain which is attended with a blessed immortality?

The strongest receipt against death is the happy estate that follows it; next to that is the fore-expectation of it and resolution against it: *He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem;* Jerusalem, the nest of his enemies, the amphitheatre of his conflicts, the fatal place of his death. Well did he know the plots and ambushes that were laid for him, and the bloody issue of those designs; yet he will go, and goes resolved for the worst. It is a sure and wise way to send our thoughts before us, to grapple with those evils which we know must be encountered. The enemy is half overcome that is well prepared for. The strongest mischief may be outfaced with a seasonable fore-resolution. There can be no greater disadvantage than the suddenness of a surprisal. O God, what I have not the power to avoid, let me have the wisdom to expect.

The way from Galilee to Judea lay through the region of Samaria, if not the city. Christ now, towards the end of his preaching, could not but be attended with a multitude of followers. It was necessary there should be purveyors and harbingers to procure lodgings and provision for so large a troop. Some of his own retinue are addressed to this service. They seek not for palaces and delicacies, but for houseroom and victuals. It was he whose the earth was and the fulness thereof, whose the heavens are and the mansions therein; yet he, who could have commanded angels, sues to Samaritans; he, that filled and compre-

hended heaven, sends for shelter in a Samaritan cottage. It was thy choice, O Saviour, to take upon thee the shape, not of a prince, but of a servant. How can we either neglect means or despise homeliness, when thou, the God of all the world, wouldst stoop to the suit of so poor a provision.

We know well in what terms the Samaritans stood with the Jews, so much more hostile as they did more symbolize in matter of religion. No nations were mutually so hateful to each other. A Samaritan's bread was no better than swine's flesh. Their very fire and water was not more grudged than infectious. The looking towards Jerusalem was here cause enough of repulse. No enmity is so desperate as that which arises from matter of religion. Agreement in some points, when there are differences in the main, doth but advance hatred the more.

It is not more strange to hear the Son of God sue for a lodging than to hear him repelled.

Upon so churlish a denial, the two angry disciples return to their Master on a fiery errand; *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias did?*

The *sons of thunder* would be *lightning* straight. Their zeal, whether as kinsmen or disciples, could not brook so harsh a refusal. As they were naturally more hot than their fellows, so now they thought their piety bade them be impatient.

Yet they dare not but begin with leave; *Master, wilt thou?* His will must lead theirs; their choler cannot drive their wills before his; all their motion is from him only. True disciples are like those artificial engines which go no otherwise than they are set; or, like little children, that speak nothing but what they are taught. O Saviour, if we have wills of our own, we are not thine. Do thou set me as thou wouldst have me go; do thou teach me what thou wouldst have me say or do.

A mannerly preface leads in a faulty suit; *Master, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?* Faulty, both in presumption and in desire of private revenge. I do not hear them say, "Master, will it please thee, who art the sole Lord of the heavens and the elements, to command fire from heaven upon these men?" but *Wilt thou that we command?* As if, because they had power given them over diseases and unclean spirits, therefore heaven and earth were in their managing. How easily might they be mistaken! Their large

commission had the just limits. Subjects that have munificent grants from their princes can challenge nothing beyond the words of their patent. And if the fetching down fire from heaven were less than the dispossessing of devils, (since the devil shall enable the beast to do thus much,) yet how possible is it to do the greater and stick at the less, where both depend upon a delegated power! The magicians of Egypt could bring forth frogs and blood, they could not bring lice; ordinary corruption can do that which they could not.

It is the fashion of our bold nature, upon an inch given, to challenge an ell; and, where we find ourselves graced with some abilities, to flatter ourselves with the faculty of more.

I grant faith hath done as great things as ever presumption undertook, but there is great difference in the enterprises of both. The one hath a warrant, either by instinct or express command; the other none at all. Indeed had these two disciples either meant or said, "Master, if it be thy pleasure to command us to call down fire from heaven, we know thy word shall enable us to do what thou requirest; if the words be ours, the power shall be thine;" this had been but holy, modest, faithful; but if they supposed there needed nothing save a leave only, and that, might they be but let loose, they could go alone, they presumed, they offended.

Yet, had they thus overshot themselves in some pious and charitable motion, the fault had been the less; now, the act had in it both cruelty and private revenge.

Their zeal was not worthy of more praise than their fury of censure. That fire should fall down from heaven upon men is a fearful thing to think of, and that which hath not been often done. It was done in the case of Sodom, when those five unclean cities burned with the unnatural fire of hellish lust: it was done two several times at the suit of Elijah; it was done in an height of trial to that great pattern of patience. I find it no more, and tremble at these I find. But, besides the dreadfulness of the judgment itself, who can but quake at the thought of the suddenness of this destruction, which sweeps away both body and soul in a state of unpreparation, of unrepentance; so as this fire should but begin a worse, this heavenly flame should but kindle that of hell?

Thus unconceivably heavy was the revenge; but what was the offence? We have learned not to think any indignity light that

is offered to the Son of God, but we know these spiritual affronts are capable of degrees. Had these Samaritans reviled Christ and his train, had they violently assaulted him, had they followed him with stones in their hands and blasphemies in their mouths, it had been a just provocation of so horrible a vengeance; now the wrong was only negative; *they received him not;* and that not out of any particular quarrel or dislike of his person, but of his nation only; the men had been welcome, had not their country distasted. All the charge that I hear our Saviour give to his disciples, in case of their rejection, is, *If they receive you not, shake off the dust of your feet.* Yet this was amongst their own, and when they went on that sacred errand of publishing the gospel of peace. These were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. This measure was not to preachers but to travellers, only a mere inhospitality to misliked guests. Yet no less revenge will serve them than fire from heaven.

I dare say for you, ye holy sons of Zebedee, it was not your spleen, but your zeal, that was guilty of so bloody a suggestion. Your indignation could not but be stirred to see the great Prophet and Saviour of the world so unkindly repelled; yet all this will not excuse you from a rash cruelty, from an inordinate rage.

Even the best heart may easily be miscarried with a well-meant zeal. No affection is either more necessary or better accepted. Love to any object cannot be severed from hatred of the contrary: whence it is, that all creatures which have the concupiscible part have also the irascible adjoined unto it. Anger and displeasure is not so much an enemy as a guardian and champion of love. Whoever therefore is rightly affected to his Saviour cannot but find much regret at his wrongs.

O gracious and divine zeal, the kindly warmth and vital temper of piety, whither hast thou withdrawn thyself from the cold hearts of men? or is this according to the just constitution of the old and decrepit age of the world into which we are fallen? How many are there that think there is no wisdom but in a dull indifferency, and choose rather to freeze than burn? How quick and apprehensive are men in cases of their own indignities! how insensible of their Saviour's!

But there is nothing so ill as the corruption of the best. Rectified zeal is not more commendable and useful than inordinate and misguided is hateful and dangerous. Fire is a necessary and beneficial element; but if it be once misplaced, and have caught

upon the beams of our houses or the stacks of our corn, nothing can be more direful.

Thus sometimes zeal turns murder; (*they that kill you shall think they do God service;*) sometimes phrensy; sometimes rude indiscretion. Wholesome and blessed is that zeal that is well grounded and well governed: grounded upon the word of truth, not upon unstable fancies; governed by wisdom and charity: wisdom, to avoid rashness and excess; charity, to avoid just offence.

No motion can want a pretence. "Elias did so, why not we? He was an holy prophet. The occasion, the place, abludes not much. There wrong was offered to a servant; here to his master: there to a man; here to a God and man. If Elias then did it, why not we?" There is nothing more perilous than to draw all the actions of holy men into examples: for as the best men have their weaknesses, so they are not privileged from letting fall unjustifiable actions. Besides that, they may have had perhaps peculiar warrants signed from heaven, whether by instinct or special command, which we shall expect in vain. There must be much caution used in our imitation of the best patterns, whether in respect of the persons or things, else we shall make ourselves apes, and our acts sinful absurdities.

It is a rare thing for our Saviour to find fault with the errors of zeal, even where have appeared sensible weaknesses. If Moses, in a sacred rage and indignation, break the tables written with God's own hand, I find him not checked. Here our meek Saviour turns back, and frowns upon his furious suitors, and takes them up roundly; *Ye know not of what spirit ye are.* The faults of uncharitableness cannot be swallowed up in zeal. If there were any colour to hide the blemishes of this misdisposition, it should be this crimson dye. But he that needs not our lie will let us know he needs not our injury, and hates to have a good cause supported by a violation of our charity. We have no reason to disclaim our passions. Even the Son of God chides sometimes; yea, where he loves. It offends not that our affections are moved, but that they are inordinate.

It was a sharp word, *Ye know not of what spirit ye are.* Another man would not perhaps have felt it; a disciple doth. Tender hearts are galled with that which the carnal mind slighteth. The spirit of Elias was that which they meant to assume and imitate: they shall now know their mark was mistaken. How would they have hated to think that any other but

God's Spirit had stirred them up to this passionate motion! now they shall know it was wrought by that ill spirit whom they professed to hate.

It is far from the good Spirit of God to stir up any man to private revenge or thirst of blood. Not an eagle, but a dove, was the shape wherein he chose to appear. Neither wouldst thou, O God, be in the whirlwind or in the fire, but in the soft voice. O Saviour, what do we seek for any precedent but thine, whose name we challenge? Thou *camest to thine own;* thine *own received* thee *not.* Didst thou call for fire from heaven upon them? didst thou not rather send down water from thy compassionate eyes, and weep for them by whom thou must bleed? Better had it been for us never to have had any spirit than any but thine. We can be no other than wicked if our mercies be cruelty.

But is it the name of Elias, O ye zealots, which ye pretend for a colour of your impotent desire? Ye do not consider the difference betwixt his spirit and yours. His was extraordinary and heroical; besides the instinct or secret command of God for this act of his: far otherwise is it with you, who by a carnal distemper are moved to this furious suggestion. Those that would imitate God's saints in singular actions must see they go upon the same grounds. Without the same spirit and the same warrant, it is either a mockery or a sin to make them our copies.

Elias is no fit pattern for disciples, but their Master: *the Son of man came not to destroy mens' lives, but to save them.* Then are our actions and intentions warrantable and praiseworthy, when they accord with his. O Saviour, when we look into those sacred acts and monuments of thine, we find many a life which thou preservedst from perishing; some that had perished, by thee recalled; never any by thee destroyed. Only one poor fig tree, as the real emblem of thy severity to the unfruitful, was blasted and withered by thy curse. But to man, how ever favourable and indulgent wert thou! So repelled as thou wert, so reviled, so persecuted, laid for, sold, betrayed, apprehended, arraigned, condemned, crucified; yet what one man didst thou strike dead for these heinous indignities? Yea, when one of thine enemies lost but an ear in that ill quarrel, thou gavest that ear to him who came to take life from thee. I find some whom thou didst scourge and correct, as the sacrilegious moneychangers; none whom thou killedst. Not that thou either lovest not, or re-

quirest not the duly severe execution of justice. Whose sword is it that princes bear, but thine? Offenders must smart and bleed. This is a just sequel, but not the intention of thy coming; thy will, not thy drift.

Good princes make wholesome laws for the well-ordering of their people. There is no authority without due coercion. The violation of these good laws is followed with death, whose end was preservation, life, order; and this not so much for revenge of an offence past, as for prevention of future mischief.

How can we then enough love and praise thy mercy, O thou Preserver of men! how should we imitate thy saving and beneficent disposition towards mankind! as knowing the more we can help to save, the nearer we come to thee, that camest to save all; and the more destructive we are, the more we resemble him who is Abaddon, a murderer from the beginning.

THE TEN LEPERS.—Luke xvii.

The Samaritans were tainted, not with schism, but heresy, but paganism; our Saviour yet balks them not, but makes use of the way as it lies, and bestows upon them the courtesy of some miracles. Some kind of commerce is lawful even with those without. Terms of entireness and leagues of inward amity are here unfit, unwarrantable, dangerous; but civil respects, and wise uses of them for our convenience or necessity, need not, must not be forborne.

Ten lepers are here met. Those that are excluded from all other society seek the company of each other. Fellowship is that we all naturally affect, though in leprosy. Ever, lepers will flock to their fellows: where shall we find one spiritual leper alone? Drunkards, profane persons, heretics, will be sure to consort with their matches. Why should not God's saints delight in an holy communion? why is it not our chief joy to assemble in good?

Jews and Samaritans could not abide one another, yet here in leprosy they accord: here was one Samaritan leper with the Jewish: community of passion hath made them friends whom even religion disjoined. What virtue there is in misery, that can unite even the most estranged hearts!

I seek not mystery in the number. These ten are met together,

and all meet Christ: not casually, but upon due deliberation; they purposely waited for this opportunity. No marvel if they thought no attendance long, to be delivered from so loathsome and miserable a disease. Great Naaman could be glad to come from Syria to Judea in hope of leaving that hateful guest behind him. We are all sensible enough of our bodily infirmities. O that we could be equally weary of the sicknesses and deformities of our better part. Surely our spiritual maladies are no less than mortal if they be not healed; neither can they heal alone. These men had died lepers if they had not met with Christ. O Saviour, give us grace to seek thee, and patience to wait for thee; and then we know thou wilt find us, and we remedy.

Where do these lepers attend for Christ, but in a village? and that, not in the street of it, but in the entrance, in the passage to it. The cities, the towns were not for them. The law of God had shut them out from all frequence, from all conversation. Care of safety and fear of infection was motive enough to make their neighbours observant of this piece of the law.

It is not the body only that is herein respected by the God of spirits. Those that are spiritually contagious must be still and ever avoided; they must be separated from us, we must be separated from them; they from us by just censures, or, if that be neglected, we from them by a voluntary declination of their familiar conversation.

Besides the benefit of our safety, wickedness would soon be ashamed of itself if it were not for the encouragement of companions. Solitariness is the fittest antidote for spiritual infection. It were happy for the wicked man if he could be separated from himself.

These lepers that came to seek Christ, yet, finding him, stand afar off, whether for reverence or for security. God had enacted this distance. It was their charge, if they were occasioned to pass through the streets to cry out, *I am unclean.* It was no less than their duty to proclaim their own infectiousness: there was not danger only, but sin in their approach. How happy were it, if in those wherein there is more peril there were more remoteness, less silence! O God, we are all lepers to thee; overspread with the loathsome scurf of our own corruptions. It becomes us well, in the conscience of our shame and vileness, to stand afar off. We cannot be too awful of thee, too much ashamed of ourselves.

Yet these men, though they be afar off in the distance of place, yet they are near in respect of the acceptance of their prayer. *The Lord is near unto all that call upon him in truth.* O Saviour, while we are afar off from thee, thou art near unto us. Never dost thou come so close to us, as when, in an holy bashfulness, we stand farthest off. Justly dost thou expect we should be at once bold and bashful. How boldly should we come to the throne of grace, in respect of the grace of that throne! how fearfully, in respect of the awfulness of the Majesty of that throne, and that unworthiness which we bring with us into that dreadful presence!

He that stands near may whisper, but he that stands afar off must cry aloud; so did these lepers. Yet not so much distance as passion strained their throats. That which can give voice to the dumb can much more give loudness to the vocal.

All cried together; these ten voices were united in one sound, that their conjoined forces might expugn that gracious ear. Had every man spoken singly for himself, this had made no noise; neither yet any show of a fervent importunity: now, as they were all affected with one common disease, so they all set out their throats together, and, though Jews and Samaritans, agree in one joint supplication. Even where there are ten tongues, the word is but one, that the condescent may be universal. When we would obtain common favours, we may not content ourselves with private and solitary devotions, but must join our spiritual forces together, and set upon God by troops: *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.* No faithful prayer goes away unrecompensed; but where many good hearts meet, the retribution must be needs answerable to the number of the petitioners. O holy and happy violence, that is thus offered to heaven! How can we want blessings when so many cords draw them down upon our heads?

It was not the sound but the matter that carried it with Christ; if the sound were shrill, the matter was faithful: *Jesu, Master, have mercy upon us.* No word can better become the mouth of the miserable. I see not where we can meet with fitter patterns. Surely they were not verier lepers than we; why do we not imitate them in their actions, who are too like them in our condition? Whither should we seek but to our Jesus? How should we stand aloof in regard of our own wretchedness! how should we lift up our voice in the fervour of our supplications! What

should we rather sue for than mercy? *Jesu, Master, have mercy upon us.*

O gracious prevention of mercy, both had and given ere it can be asked! Jesus, when he saw them, said, *Go, show yourselves to the priests.* Their disease is cured ere it can be complained of. Their showing to the priest presupposes them whole; whole in his grant, though not in their own apprehension. That single leper that came to Christ before, (Matt. viii. Luke v.) was first cured in his own sense; and then was bid to go to the priest for approbation of the cure. It was not so with these, who are sent to the judges of leprosy with an intention they shall in the way find themselves healed. There was a different purpose in both these; in the one, that the perfection of the cure might be convinced, and seconded with a due sacrifice; in the other, that the faith of the patients might be tried in the way, which, if it had not held as strong in the prosecution of their suit as in the beginning, had, I doubt, failed of the effect. How easily might these lepers think, "Alas! to what purpose is this? Show ourselves to the priests! what can their eyes do? They can judge whether it be cured, which we see yet it is not; they cannot cure it. This is not now to do. We have been seen enough, and loathed. What can their eyes see more than our own? We had well hoped that Jesus would have vouchsafed to call us to him, and to lay his hands upon us, and to have healed us." These thoughts had kept them lepers still. Now shall their faith and obedience be proved by their submission both to this sudden command and that divine ordination.

That former leper was charged to show himself to the chief priest, these to the priests; either would serve: the original command runs either to Aaron or to one of his sons. But why to them? Leprosy was a bodily sickness; what is this to spiritual persons? Wherefore serve physicians, if the priests must meddle with diseases? We never shall find those sacred persons to pass their judgment upon fevers, dropsies, palsies, or any other bodily distemper; neither should they on this, were it not that this affection of the body is joined with a legal uncleanness. Not as a sickness, but as an impurity must it come under their cognizance; neither this, without a further implication. Who but the successors of the legal priesthood are proper to judge of the uncleanness of the soul? whether an act be sinful, or in what degree it is such; what grounds are sufficient for the comfortable

assurance of repentance, of forgiveness; what courses are fittest to avoid the danger of relapses; who is so like to know, so meet to judge, as our teachers? Would we in these cases consult ofter with our spiritual guides, and depend upon their faithful advices and well-grounded absolutions, it were safer, it were happier for us. O the dangerous extremity of our wisdom! Our hoodwinked progenitors would have no eyes but in the heads of their ghostly fathers: we think ourselves so quicksighted, that we pity the blindness of our able teachers; none but ourselves are fit to judge of our own leprosy.

Neither was it only the peculiar judgment of the priest that was here intended, but the thankfulness of the patient, that by the sacrifice which he should bring with him he might give God the glory of his sanation. O God, whomsoever thou curest of this spiritual leprosy, it is reason he should present thee with the true evangelical sacrifices, not of his praises only, but of himself, which are *reasonable* and *living*. We are still leprous, if we do not first see ourselves foul, and then find ourselves thankfully serviceable.

The lepers did not, would not go of themselves, but are sent by Christ; *Go, and show yourselves*. And why sent by him? Was it in obedience to the law? was it out of respect to the priesthood? was it for prevention of cavils? was it for conviction of gainsayers? or was it for confirmation of the miracle? Christ, that was above the law, would not transgress it. He knew this was his charge by Moses. How justly might he have dispensed with his own! But he will not; though the law doth not bind the Maker, he will voluntarily bind himself. He was within the ken of his *Consummatum est;* yet would not anticipate that approaching end, but holds the law on foot till his last pace. This was but a branch of the ceremonial, yet would he not slight it, but in his own person gives example of a studious observation. How carefully should we submit ourselves to the royal laws of our Creator, to the wholesome laws of our superiors, while the Son of God would not but be so punctual in a ceremony!

While I look to the persons of those priests I see nothing but corruption, nothing but professed hostility to the true Messiah. All this cannot make thee, O Saviour, to remit any point of the observance due to their places. Their function was sacred, whatever their persons were. Though they have not the grace to give thee thy due, thou wilt not fail to give them theirs. How justly

dost thou expect all due regard to thine evangelical priesthood, who gavest so curious respect to the legal! It were shame the synagogue should be above the Church, or that priesthood, which thou meantest speedily to abrogate, should have more honour than that which thou meantest to establish and perpetuate.

Had this duty been neglected, what clamours had been raised by his emulous adversaries! What scandals! Though the fault had been the patient's, not the physician's. But they that watched Christ so narrowly, and were apt to take so poor exceptions at his sabbath-cures, at the unwashen hands of his disciples, how much more would they have calumniated him, if by his neglect the law of leprosy had been palpably transgressed! Not only evil must be avoided, but offence; and that not on our parts, but on others'. That offence is ours, which we might have remedied.

What a noble and irrefragable testimony was this to the power, to the truth of the Messiah! How can these Jews but either believe, or be made inexcusable in not believing? When they shall see so many lepers come at once to the temple, all cured by a secret will, without word or touch, how can they choose but say, "This work is supernatural, no limited power could do this? How is he not God, if his power be infinite?" Their own eyes shall be witnesses and judges of their own conviction.

The cure is done by Christ more exquisitely than by art or nature, yet it is not publicly assured and acknowledged, till, according to the Mosaical law, certain subsequent rites be performed. There is no admittance into the congregation but by sprinkling of blood. O Saviour, we can never be ascertained of our cleansing from that spiritual leprosy wherewith our souls are tainted but by the sprinkling of thy most precious blood; *wash us* with that, *and we shall be whiter than snow.*

This act of showing to the priest was not more required by the law than prerequired of these lepers by our Saviour for the trial of their obedience. Had they now stood upon terms with Christ, and said, "We will first see what cause there will be to show ourselves to the priests; they need not see our lepry; we shall be glad they should see our cure: do thou work that which we shall show, and bid us show what thou hast wrought: till then excuse us: it is our grief and shame to be seen too much;" they had been still lepers.

It hath been ever God's wont by small precepts to prove mens' dispositions. Obedience is as well tried in a trifle as in the most

important charge; yea, so much more as the thing required is less: for ofttimes those who would be careful in main affairs think they may neglect the smallest. What command soever we receive from God or our superiors, we must not scan the weight of the thing, but the authority of the commander. Either difficulty or slightness are vain pretences for disobedience.

These lepers are wiser; they obeyed, and went. What was the issue? *As they went, they were healed.* Lo, had they stood still, they had been lepers; now they went, they are whole. What haste the blessing makes to overtake their obedience! This walk was required by the very law, if they should have found themselves healed: what was it to prevent the time a little, and to do that sooner upon hopes, which upon sense they must do after? The horror of the disease adds to the grace of the cure; and that is so much more gracious as the task is easier: it shall cost them but a walk. It is the bounty of that God whom we serve, to reward our worthless endeavours with infinite requitals. He would not have any proportion betwixt our acts and his remunerations.

Yet besides this recompense of obedience, O Saviour, thou wouldest herein have respect to thine own just glory. Had not these lepers been cured in the way, but in the end of their walk, upon their showing to the priests, the miracle had lost much light: perhaps the priests would have challenged it to themselves, and have attributed it to their prayers; perhaps the lepers might have thought it was thy purpose to honour the priests, as the instruments of that marvellous cure: now, there can be no colour of any other's participation, since the leprosy vanishes in the way. As thy power, so thy praise admits of no partners.

And now, methinks, I see what an amazed joy there was amongst these lepers, when they saw themselves thus suddenly cured; each tells other what a change he feels in himself; each comforts other with the assurance of his outward clearness; each congratulates other's happiness, and thinks and says how joyful this news will be to their friends and families. Their society now serves them well to applaud and heighten their new felicity.

The miracle, indifferently wrought upon all is differently taken. All went forward, according to the appointment, toward the priests; all were obedient, one only was thankful. All were cured; all saw themselves cured; their sense was alike; their hearts were not alike. What could make the difference, but

grace? and who could make the difference of grace but he that gave it? He that wrought the cure in all wrought the grace, not in all, but in one. The same act, the same motives, are not equally powerful to all: where the ox finds grass, the viper poison. We all pray, all hear; one goes away bettered, another cavils. Will makes the difference; but who makes the difference of wills but he that made them? He that creates the new heart leaves a stone in one bosom, puts flesh into another: *It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that hath mercy.* O God, if we look not up to thee, we may come, and not be healed; we may be healed, and not be thankful.

This one man breaks away from his fellows to seek Christ. While we was a leper, he consorted with lepers; now that he is healed, he will be free. He saith not, "I came with these men, with them will I go; if they will return, I will accompany them; if not, what should I go alone? As I am not wiser than they, so I have no more reason to be more thankful." There are cases wherein singularity is not lawful only, but laudable: *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil: I and my house will serve the Lord.* It is a base and unworthy thing for a man so to subject himself to others' examples, as not sometimes to resolve to be an example to others. When either evil is to be done or good neglected, how much better is it to go the right way alone, than to err with company!

O noble pattern of thankfulness! What speed of retribution is here! No sooner doth he see his cure, than he hastes to acknowledge it: the benefit shall not die, not sleep in his hand. Late professions of our obligations savour of dulness and ingratitude. What a laborious and diligent officiousness is here! he stands not still, but puts himself to the pains of a return. What a hearty recognition of the blessing! his voice was not more loud in his suit than in his thanks. What an humble reverence of his Benefactor! he falls down at his feet; as acknowledging at once beneficence and unworthiness. It were happy for all Israel if they could but learn of this Samaritan.

This man is sent with the rest to the priests. He well knew this duty a branch of the law of ceremonies, which he meant not to neglect; but his heart told him there was a moral duty of professing thankfulness to his Benefactor, which called for his first attendance. First therefore he turns back, ere he will stir forward. Reason taught this Samaritan, and us in him, that

ceremony must yield to substance; and that main points of obedience must take place of all ritual compliments.

It is not for nothing that note is made of the country of this thankful leper; *he was a Samaritan.* The place is known and branded with the infamy of a paganish misreligion. Outward disadvantage of place or parentage cannot block up the way of God's grace and free election; as, contrarily, the privileges of birth and nature avail us nothing in spiritual occasions.

How sensible wert thou, O Saviour, of thine own beneficence! *Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?* The trooping of these lepers together did not hinder thy reckoning. It is both justice and wisdom in thee to keep a strict account of thy favours. There is an wholesome and useful art of forgetfulness in us men, both of benefits done and of wrongs offered. It is not so with God. Our injuries, indeed, he soon puts over; making it no small part of his style, that he *forgives iniquities:* but for his mercies, there is no reason he should forget them; they are worthy of more than our memory. His favours are universal over all his works; there is no creature that tastes not of his bounty; his sun and rain are for others besides his friends; but none of his good turns escapes either his knowledge or record. Why should not we, O God, keep a book of our receipts from thee; which, agreeing with thine, may declare thee bounteous and us thankful?

Our Saviour doth not ask this by way of doubt, but of exprobration. Full well did he count the steps of those absent lepers. He knew where they were. He upbraids their ingratitude, that they were not where they should have been. It was thy just quarrel, O Saviour, that, while one Samaritan returned, nine Israelites were healed and returned not. Had they been all Samaritans, this had been faulty; but now they were Israelites, their ingratitude was more foul than their leprosy. The more we are bound to God, the more shameful is our unthankfulness. There is scarce one in ten that is careful to give God his own: this neglect is not more general than displeasing. Christ had never missed their presence if their absence had not been hateful and injurious.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.—John v.

MEDITATED ON IN A SERMON PREACHED AT THE COURT BEFORE KING JAMES OF BLESSED MEMORY.

TO THE READER.

The Reader may be pleased to understand that my manner hath still been, first to pass through all these Divine Histories by way of Sermons, and then after to gather the quintessence of those larger discourses into these forms of Meditations which he sees: only I have thought good upon these two following heads, for some good reasons, to publish the Sermons in their own shape as they were delivered without alteration. It seemed not amiss that some of those metals should be shown in the ore, whereof so great a quantity was presented in the wedge.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

Otherwhere, ye may look long and see no miracle; but here, behold two miracles in one view: the former, of the angel curing diseases; the latter, of the God of angels, Christ Jesus, preventing the angel in his cure. Even the first, Christ wrought by the angel; the second, immediately by himself. The first is incomparable; for, as Montanus truly observes, there is no one *miraculum perpetuum* but this one in the whole book of God.

Be content to spend this hour with me in the porches of Bethesda, and consider with me the topography, the aitiology, the chronography of this miracle. These three limit our speech and your patient attention.

The chronography, which is first in place and time, offers us two heads: 1. A feast of the Jews; 2. Christ going up to the feast.

The Jews were full of holy-days, both of God's institution and the Church's.

Of God's;—both weekly, monthly, anniversary.—Weekly; that one of seven, which I would to God we had learned of them to keep better. In this regard it was that Seneca said the Jews did *septimam ætatis partem perdere*, "lose the seventh part of their life."—Monthly; the new moons, Numb. xxviii.—Anniversary; Easter, Pentecost, and the September feasts.

The Church's;—both the Purim, by Mardocheus; and the Encænia, by Judas Maccabæus, which yet Christ honoured by his solemnization, John x.

Surely God did this for the cheerfulness of his people in his service: hence the Church hath laudably imitated this example.

To have no feasts is sullen; to have too many is paganish and superstitious. Neither would God have cast the Christian Easter upon the just time of the Jewish Pasch, and their Whitsuntide upon the Jewish Pentecost, if he would not have had these feasts continued. And why should the Christian Church have less power than the Jewish Synagogue?

Here was not a mere feriation, but a feasting: they must appear before God *cum muneribus, with gifts.* The tenth part of their increase must be spent upon the three solemn feasts, besides their former tithes to Levi, Deut. xiv. 23. There was no holy-day wherein they feasted above six hours; and in some of them tradition urged them to their quantities of drink: and David, when he would keep holy-day to the ark, allows every Israelite a cake of bread, a piece of flesh, a bottle of wine; not a dry dinner, *prandium caninum,* not a mere drinking, of wine without meat, but to make up a perfect feast, bread, flesh, wine; 2 Sam. vi. 19.

The true Purims of this island are those two feasts of August and November[a]. He is no true Israelite that keeps them not; as the days which the Lord hath made. When are joy and triumphs seasonable, if not at feasts? but not excess. Pardon me, I know not how feasts are kept at the court; but, as Job, when he thought of the banquets of his sons, says, *It may be they have sinned;* so let me speak at peradventures. If sensual immoderation should have set her foot into these Christian feasts, let me at least say with indulgent Eli, *Non est bona fama, filii, It is no good report, my sons.* Do ye think that St. Paul's rule, *Non in comessationibus et ebrietate, not in surfeiting and drunkenness,* was for work-days only? The Jews had a conceit, that on their sabbath and feast-days the devils fled from their cities *ad montes umbrosos,* "to the shady mountains." Let it not be said that on our Christian feasts they should *e montibus aulam petere;* and that he seeks, and finds not, *loca arida,* but *madida.* God forbid, that Christians should sacrifice to Bacchus instead of the everliving God; and that on the day when you should have been blown up by treacherous fire from earth to heaven, you should fetch down the fire of God's anger from heaven upon you by swilling and surfeits: God forbid. God's service is *unum necessarium, one thing necessary,* saith Christ.

[a] [Aug. 5, 1600, when James narrowly escaped death in the Gowrie Conspiracy, and Nov. 5, 1605, the Gunpowder Plot.]

Homo ebrius superflua creatura, "A drunken man is a superfluous creature," saith Ambrose. How ill do those two agree together! This I have been bold to say out of caution, not of reproof.

Thus much, that there was a feast of the Jews. Now what feast it was is questionable: whether the Pasch, as Irenæus, and Beza with him, thinks, upon the warrant of John iv. 35, where our Saviour had said, *Yet four months, and then comes harvest;* or whether Pentecost, which was fifty days from the shaking of the sheaf, (that was Easter Sunday,) as Cyril, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, and some later; or whether one of the September feasts, as some others. The excellency of the feast makes for Easter, the feast κατ' ἐξοχήν· the number of interpreters, for Pentecost; the number of feasts, for September: for, as God delighted in the number of seven, the seventh day was holy, the seventh year, the seventh seven year; so he showed it in the seventh month, which reserves his number still, September; the first day whereof was the Sabbath of Trumpets, the tenth *Dies Expiationum,* and on the fifteenth began the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days.

It is an idleness to seek that which we are never the better when we have found. What if Easter? What if Tabernacles? What if Pentecost? What loss, what gain is this? *Magna nos molestia Johannes liberasset, si unum adjecisset verbum,* "John had eased us of much trouble, if he had added but one word," saith Maldonat. But for us, God give them sorrow which love it: this is one of St. Paul's διαπαρατριβαὶ[b], *vain disputations,* that he forbids his Timothy; yea, which is the subject thereof, one of them, which he calls μωρὰς καὶ ἀπαιδεύτους ζητήσεις, *foolish and unlearned questions,* 2 Tim. ii. 23[c]. *Quantum mali facit nimia subtilitas!* "How much mischief is done by too much subtlety!" saith Seneca. These are for some idle cloisterers, that have nothing to do but to pick straws in divinity: like to Appian the grammarian, that with long discourse would pick out of Homer's first verse of his Iliads, and the first word, μῆνιν, the number of the books of Iliads and Odysseys; or like Didymus χαλκέντερος, that spent some of his four thousand books about which was Homer's country, who was Æneas's true mother, what the age of Hecuba, how long it was betwixt Homer and Orpheus; or those wise critics of whom Seneca speaks, that spent whole volumes

[b] [παραδιατριβαί. Mill.] [c] [Senec. Epist. 78. sub fin.]

whether Homer or Hesiod were the elder. *Non profuturam scientiam tradunt,* "They vent an unprofitable skill," as he said. Let us be content with the learned ignorance of what God hath concealed, and know that what he hath concealed will not avail us to know.

Rather let us inquire why Christ would go up to the feast. I find two silken cords that drew him up thither. His obedience. His desire of manifesting his glory.

First, It was a general law, All males must appear thrice a year before the Lord. Behold, he was the God whom they went up to worship at the feast; yet he goes up to worship. He began his life in obedience, when he came in his mother's belly to Bethlehem, at the taxation of Augustus; and so he continues it. He knew his due: *Of whom do the kings of the earth receive tribute? of their own, or of strangers? Then their sons are free.* Yet he that would pay tribute to Cæsar will also pay this tribute of obedience to his Father. He that was above the law yields to the law: *Legi satisfacere voluit, esti non sub lege,* "He would satisfy the law, though he were not under the law." The Spirit of God says, *He learned obedience in that he suffered:* surely also he taught obedience in that he did. This was his πρέπον ἐστὶ to John Baptist, *It becomes us to fulfil all righteousness.* He will not abate his Father one ceremony. It was dangerous to go up to that Jerusalem which he had left before for their malice; yet now he will up again. His obedience drew him up to that bloody feast wherein himself was sacrificed; how much more now that he might sacrifice! What can we plead to have learned of Christ if not his first lesson, obedience? The same proclamation that Gideon made to Israel he makes still to us, *As ye see me do, so do ye.* Whatsoever therefore God enjoins us, either immediately by himself, or mediately by his deputies, if we will be Christians, we must so observe, as those that know themselves bound to tread in his steps that said, *In the volume of thy book it is written of me, I desired to do thy will, O God,* Psalm xl. 6. *I will have obedience,* saith God, *and not sacrifice.* But where sacrifice is obedience, he will have obedience in sacrificing. Therefore Christ went up to the feast.

The second motive was the manifestation of his glory. If we be the light of the world which are so much snuff, what is he that is *the Father of lights?* It was not for him to be set under the bushel of Nazareth, but upon the table of Jerusalem. Thither,

and then was the confluence of all the tribes. Many a time had Christ passed by this man before, when the streets were empty; for there he lay many years; yet heals him not till now. He that sometimes modestly steals a miracle with a *Vide ne cui dixeris, See thou tell no man,* that no man might know it; at other times does wonders upon the scaffold of the world, that no man might be ignorant, and bids proclaim it on the housetops. It was fit the world should be thus publicly convinced, and either won by belief or lost by inexcusableness. Good, the more common it is, the better. *I will praise thee,* saith David, *in ecclesia magna, in the great congregation.* Glory is not got in corners. *No man,* say the envious kinsmen of Christ, *keeps close and would be famous:* no, nor that would have God celebrated. The best opportunities must be taken in glorifying him. He that would be crucified at the feast, that his death and resurrection might be more famous, will at the feast do miracles, that his Divine power might be approved openly. Christ is *flos campi, non horti,* "the flower of the field, not of the garden," saith Bernard. God cannot abide to have his graces smothered in us; *I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart,* saith the psalmist. Absalom, when he would be *insigniter improbus,* "notoriously wicked," does his villany publicly, in the eyes of the sun, under no curtain but heaven. He that would do notable service to God must do it conspicuously. Nicodemus gained well by Christ, but Christ got nothing by him, so long as, like a night bird, he never came to him but with owls and bats. Then he began to be a profitable disciple when he durst oppose the Pharisees in their condemnation of Christ, though indefinitely; but most, when in the night of his death the light of his faith brought him openly to take down the sacred corpse before all the gazing multitude, and to embalm it. When we confess God's name, with the Psalmist, before kings; when kings, defenders of the faith, profess their religion in public and everlasting monuments to all nations, to all times; this is glorious to God, and in God to them. It is no matter how close evils be, nor how public good is.

This is enough for the chronography, the topography follows.

I will not here stand to show you the ignorance of the Vulgar translation in joining *probatica* and *piscina* together, against their own fair Vatican copy with other ancient; nor spend time to discuss whether ἀγορά or πύλη be here understood for the substantive of προβατική: it is most likely to be that sheep-gate spoken of in

Ezra; nor to show how ill *piscina* in the Latin answers the Greek κολυμβήθρα· ours turn it a *pool*, better than any Latin word can express it; nor to show you, as I might, how many public pools were in Jerusalem; nor to discuss the use of this pool, whether it were for washing the beasts to be sacrificed, or to wash the entrails of the sacrifice, whence I remember Jerome fetches the virtue of the water, and in his time thought he discerned some redness, as if the blood spilt four hundred years before could still retain its first tincture in a liquid substance; besides that it would be a strange swimming pool that were brewed with blood, and this was κολυμβήθρα. This conceit arises from the error of the construction in mismatching κολυμβήθρα with προβατική. Neither will I argue whether it should be Bethsida, or Bethzida, or Bethsheda, or Bethesda. If either you or myself knew not how to be rid of time, we might easily wear out as many hours in this pool as this poor impotent man did years. But it is edification that we affect, and not curiosity.

This pool had *five porches*. Neither will I run here with St. Austin into allegories, that this pool was the people of the Jews, *Aquæ multæ, populus multus*, and these five porches the law in the five books of Moses; nor stand to confute Adrichomius, who, out of Josephus, would persuade us that these five porches were built by Solomon, and that this was *stagnum Solomonis*, for the use of the temple. The following words show the use of the porches, for the receipt of *impotent, sick, blind, halt, withered, that waited for the moving of the water*. It should seem it was walled about to keep it from cattle, and these five vaulted entrances were made by some benefactors for the more convenience of attendance. Here was the mercy of God seconded by the charity of men: if God will give cure, they will give harbour. Surely it is a good matter to put our hand to God's, and to further good works with convenience of enjoying them.

Jerusalem was grown a city of blood to the persecution of the prophets, to a wilful despite of what belonged to her peace, to a profanation of God's temple, to a mere formality in God's services; and yet here were public works of charity in the midst of her streets. We may not always judge of the truth of piety by charitable actions. Judas disbursed the money for Christ, there was no traitor but he. The poor traveller that was robbed and wounded betwixt Jerusalem and Jericho was passed over first by

the priest, then the Levite; at last the Samaritan came and relieved him. His religion was naught, yet his act was good; the priest's and Levite's religion good, their uncharity ill. Novatus himself was a martyr, yet a schismatic. Faith is the soul and good works are the breath, saith St. James: but as you see in a pair of bellows there is a forced breath without life; so in those that are puffed up with the wind of ostentation, there may be charitable works without faith.

The church of Rome, unto her four famous orders of Jacobins, Franciscans, Augustins, and Carmelites, hath added a fifth, of Jesuits; and, like another Jerusalem, for those five leprous and lazarly orders, hath built five porches, that if the water of any state be stirred, they may put in for a share. How many cells and convents hath she raised for these miserable cripples! and now she thinks (though she exalt herself above all that is called God, though she dispense with and against God, though she fall down before every block and wafer, though she kill kings and equivocate with magistrates) she is the only city of God: *Digna est, nam struxit synagogam, She is worthy, for she hath built a synagogue.*

Are we more orthodox, and shall not we be as charitable? I am ashamed to think of rich noblemen and merchants, that die and give nothing to our five porches of Bethesda. What shall we say? Have they made their mammon their god, instead of making friends with their mammon to God? Even when they die, will they not, like Ambrose's good usurers, part with that which they cannot hold, that they may get that which they cannot lose? Can they begin their will, *In Dei nomine, Amen*, and give nothing to God? Is he only a witness, and not a legatee? Can we bequeath our souls to Christ in heaven, and give nothing to his limbs on earth? And if they will not give, yet will they not lend to God? *He that gives to the poor, fœneratur Deo, lends to God.* Will they put out to any but God? and then; when, instead of giving security, he receives with one hand and pays with another, receives our bequest and gives us glory? O damnable niggardliness of vain men, that shames the gospel and loses heaven! Let me show you a Bethesda that wants porches. What truer house of effusion than the Church of God; which sheds forth waters of comfort, yea of life? Behold some of the porches of this Bethesda, so far from building, that they are pulled down. It is a wonder,

if the demolished stones of God's house have not built some of yours; and if some of you have not your rich suits guarded with souls.

There were wont to be reckoned three wonders of England, *Ecclesia, Femina, Lana*, "The Churches, the Women, the Wool." *Femina* may pass still; who may justly challenge wonder for their vanity if not their persons. As for *Lana*, if it be wonderful alone, I am sure it is ill joined with *Ecclesia*: the Church is fleeced, and hath nothing but a bare pelt left upon her back. And as for *Ecclesia*, either men have said with the Babylonians, *Down with it, down with it, even to the ground*; or else, in respect of the maintenance, with Judas, *Ut quid perditio hæc? Why was this waste?* How many remorseful souls have sent back, with Jacob's sons, their money in their sacks' mouths? how many great testators have in their last will returned the anathematized *peculium* of impropriations to the Church; choosing rather to impair their heir than to burden their souls? *Dum times, ne pro te patrimonium tuum perdas, ipse patrimonio tuo pereas*, saith Cyprian[a]; "While thou fearest to lose thy patrimony for thy own good, thou perishest with thy patrimony."

Ye great men, spend not all your time in building castles in the air, or houses on the sand; but set your hands and purses to the building of the porches of Bethesda. It is a shame for a rich Christian to be like a Christmas-box, that receives all, and nothing can be got out till it be broken in pieces; or like unto a drowned man's hand, that holds whatsoever it gets: *To do good and to distribute forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

This was the place, what was the use of it? All sorts of patients were at the bank of Bethesda: where should cripples be but at the Spital? *The sick, blind, lame, withered*, all that did either *morbo laborare* or *vitio corporis*, complain of sickness or impotency, were there. In natural course, one receipt heals not all diseases; no, nor one agent: one is an oculist, another a bone-setter, another a chirurgeon; but all diseases are alike to the supernatural power of God.

Hippocrates, though the prince of physicians, yet swears by Æsculapius he will never meddle with cutting of the stone. There is no disease that art will not meddle with, there are many that it cannot cure. The poor *hæmorrhoissa* was eighteen years in

[a] [Cypr. de Op. et Eleem.]

the physicians' hands; and had purged away both her body and her substance. Yea, some it kills instead of healing; whence one Hebrew word signifies both *physicians* and *dead men*[b]. But behold here all sicknesses cured by one hand and by one water. O all ye that are spiritually sick and diseased, come to the pool of Bethesda, the blood of Christ. Do ye complain of the blindness of your ignorance? here ye shall receive clearness of sight; of the distemper of passions? here ease; of the superfluity of your sinful humours? here evacuation; of the impotency of your obedience? here integrity; of the dead witheredness of good affections? here life and vigour. Whatsoever your infirmity be, come to the pool of Bethesda and be healed.

All these may be cured, yet shall be cured at leisure. All must wait; all must hope in waiting. Methinks I see how enviously these cripples look one upon another, each thinking other a let, each watching to prevent other, each hoping to be next; like emulous courtiers, that gape and vie for the next preferment, and think it a pain to hope and a torment to be prevented. But Bethesda must be waited on. He is worthy of his crutches that will not stay God's leisure for his cure. There is no virtue, no success, without patience. Waiting is a familiar lesson with courtiers; and here we have all need of it. One is sick of an overflowing of the gall, another of a tumour of pride, another of the tentigo of lust, another of the vertigo of inconstancy, another of the choking squinancy of curses and blasphemies; one of the boulimy of gluttony, another of the pleuritical stitches of envy; one of the contracting cramp of covetousness, another of the atrophy of unproficiency; one is hidebound with pride, another is consumed with emulation, another rotten with corrupt desires: and we are so much the sicker if we feel not these distempers. O that we could wait at the Bethesda of God, attend diligently upon his ordinances: we could no more fail of cure than now we can hope for cure. We wait hard and endure much for the body. *Quantis laboribus agitur, ut longiore tempore laboretur! Multi cruciatus suscipiuntur certi, ut pauci dies adjiciantur incerti;* "What toil do we take that we may toil yet longer! We endure many certain pains for the addition of a few uncertain days;" saith Austin. Why will we not do thus for the soul? without waiting it will not be. The cripple, Acts iii. 4, was bidden, Βλέψον εἰς ἡμᾶς, *Look up to us.* He looked up. It was cold comfort that he heard;

[b] [See Taylor's Hebr. Concord. No. 1807, and Gesenius Voc. מֵת.]

Silver and gold have I none: but the next clause made amends for all, *Surge et ambula, Rise and walk:* and this was because ἐπεῖχεν προσδοκῶν, *he attended expecting*, v. 5. Would we be cured? it is not for us to snatch at Bethesda as a dog at Nilus; nor to draw water and away, as Rebekah; nor to set us a while upon the banks, as the Israelites by the rivers of Babylon: but we must dwell in God's house, wait at Bethesda.

But what shall I say to you, courtiers, but even as St. Paul to his Corinthians, *Ye are full, ye are rich, ye are strong without* us? Many of you come to this place, not as to Bethel, the house of God, or Bethesda, the house of effusion; but as to Bethaven, the house of vanity. If ye have not lost your old wont, there are more words spoken in the outer closet by the hearers, than in the chapel by the preacher; as if it were closet, *quasi* close set, in an exchange, like communication of news. What do ye think of sermons as matters of formality, as very superfluities, as your own idle compliments, which either ye hear not or believe not? What do ye think of yourselves? Have ye only a postern to go to heaven by yourselves, where through ye can go, besides the foolishness of preaching? or do ye sing that old Pelagian note, *Quid nunc mihi opus est Deo?* "What need have I of God?" What should I say to this but *Increpa, Domine?*

As for our household sermons, our auditors are like the fruit of a tree in an unseasonable year, or like a wood new felled, that hath some few spires left for standers some poles distance; or like the tithe sheaves in a field when the corn is gone, εἰς δύο τρεῖς, &c. as he said. It is true ye have more sermons and more excellent than all the courts under heaven put together; but as Austin said well, *Quid mihi proderat bona res non utenti bene*[c]*?* "What am I the better for a good thing if I use it not well?" Let me tell you, all these forcible means, not well used, will set you the farther off from heaven. If the chapel were the Bethesda of promotion, what thronging would there be into it! yea, if it were but some mask house, wherein a glorious though momentary show were to be presented, neither white staves nor halberts could keep you out. Behold, here ye are offered the honour to be, by this seed of regeneration, the sons of God. The kingdom of heaven, the crown of glory, the sceptre of majesty, in one word, eternal life, is here offered and performed to you. O let us not so far forget ourselves, as in the ordinances of God to contemn our own hap-

[c] [Aug. Confess. l. iv. c. 16.]

piness: but let us know the time of our visitation; let us wait reverently and intentively upon this Bethesda of God, that when the angel shall descend and move the water, our souls may be cured, and through all the degrees of grace may be carried to the full height of their glory.

THE FIRST PART OF THE MEDITATIONS UPON THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.

Matthew xvii; Mark ix; Luke ix.

IN A SERMON PREACHED AT HAVERING BOWER, BEFORE KING JAMES OF BLESSED MEMORY.

There is not in all divinity a higher speculation than this of Christ transfigured. Suffer me therefore to lead you up by the hand into Mount Tabor, for nearer to heaven ye cannot come while ye are upon earth; that you may see him glorious upon earth, the region of his shame and abasement, who is now glorious in heaven the throne of his Majesty.

He that would not have his Transfiguration spoken of till he were raised, would have it spoken of all the world over now that he is raised and ascended; that by this momentary glory we may judge of the eternal.

The circumstances shall be to us as the skirts of the hill, which we will climb up lightly; the time, place, attendants, company: the time, *after six days;* the place, *an high hill, apart;* the attendants, *Peter, James, John;* the company, *Moses and Elias:* which when we have passed, on the top of the hill shall appear to us that sight which shall once make us glorious, and in the meantime happy.

All three evangelists accord in the *terminus a quo*, that it was immediately after those words, *There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Son of man come in his kingdom:* wherein, methinks, the act comments upon the words. Peter, James, and John were these *some:* they tasted not of death till they saw this heavenly image of the royalty of Christ glorified.

But the *terminus quo* disagrees a little. Matthew and Mark say, *after six;* Luke, *post fere octo:* which as they are easily reconciled by the usual distinction of *inclusive* and *exclusive*, necessary for all computations, and Luke's *about eight;* so, me-

thinks, seem to intimate God's seventh day, the sabbath: why should there be else so precise mention of six days after, and about eight, but to imply that day which was betwixt the sixth and eighth? God's day was fittest for so divine a work; and well might that day which imported God's rest and man's glory be used for the clear representation of the rest and glory of God and man. But in this conjecture, for aught I know, I go alone. I dare not be too resolute. Certainly it was the seventh, whether it were that seventh, the seventh after the promise of the glory of his kingdom exhibited, and this, perhaps, not without a mystery. "God teacheth both by words and acts," saith Hilary, "that after six ages of the world should be Christ's glorious appearance, and our transfiguration with him[d]." But I know what our Saviour's farewell was, *οὐχ ὑμῶν γνῶναι, it is not for* us *to know.* But if we may not know, we may conjecture; yet not *above that we ought,* saith S. Paul: we may not *super sapere,* as Tertullian's phrase is.

For the place, tradition hath taken it still for Tabor. I list not to cross it without warrant.

This was an high hill indeed, "thirty furlongs high," saith Josephus, *mira rotunditate sublimis,* saith Jerome; and so steep, that some of our English travellers that have desired to climb it of late, have been glad to give it up in the midway, and to measure the rest with their eyes.

Doubtless this hill was a symbol of heaven, being near it, as in situation, in resemblance. Heaven is expressed usually by the name of *God's hill;* and nature, or this appellation, taught the heathens to figure it by their Olympus.

All divine affairs of any magnificence were done on hills. On the hill of Sinai was the Law delivered; on the hill of Moriah was Isaac to be sacrificed; whence Abraham's poesy is, בְּהַר יְרֹאֶה *in monte providebitur:* on the hill of Rephidim stood Moses with the rod of God in his stretched hand, and figured Him crucified upon the hill whom Joshua figured victorious in the valley; on the hills of Ebal and Gerizim were the blessings and curses; on Carmel was Elijah's sacrifice; the *phrontisteria,* schools or universities of the prophets, were still Ramah and Gibeah, *excelsa,* high places: who knows not that on the hill of Sion stood the Temple? *I have looked up to the hills,* saith the Psalmist; and idolatry, in imitation, had their hill altars: on the Mount of Olives was Christ wont to send up his prayers, and sent up him-

[d] [Comment. in Matt. c. xvii.]

self: and here, Luke saith, *he went up to an high hill to pray;* not for that God makes difference of places, to whose immensity heaven itself is a valley; it was an heathenish conceit of those Aramites that God is *Deus montium, the God of the mountains;* but because we are commonly more disposed to good, by either the freedom of our scope to heaven, or the awfulness or solitary silence of places, which, as one saith, strikes a kind of adoration into us, or by our local removal from this attractive body of the earth: howsoever, when the body sees itself above the earth, the eye of the mind is more easily raised to her heaven.

It is good to take all advantage of place (setting aside superstition) to further our devotion. Aaron and Hur were in the mountain with Moses, and held up his hands. *Aaron*, say some allegorists, is mountainous; *Hur*, fiery: heavenly meditation and the fire of charity must lift up our prayers to God. As Satan carried up Christ to an high hill, to tempt him; so he carries up himself, to be freed from temptation and distraction. If ever we would be transfigured in our disposition, we must leave the earth below, and abandon all worldly thoughts. *Venite, ascendamus;* "O come, let us climb up to the hill, where God sees or is seen," saith devout Bernard[e]. "O all ye cares, distractions, thoughtfulness, labours, pains, servitudes, stay me here with this ass, my body, till I with the boy, that is, my reason and understanding, shall worship and return," saith the same father, wittily alluding to the journey of Abraham for his sacrifice.

Wherefore then did Christ climb up this high hill? Not to look about him, but, saith St. Luke, προσεύξασθαι, *to pray;* not for prospect, but for devotion; that his thoughts might climb up yet nearer to heaven.

Behold how Christ entered upon all his great works with prayers in his mouth. When he was to enter into that great work of his humiliation in his Passion, he went into the garden to pray; when he is to enter into this great work of his exaltation in his transfiguring, he went up into the mountain to pray: he was taken up from his knees to both.

O noble example of piety and devotion to us! He was God that prayed: the God that he prayed to he might have commanded; yet he prayed, that we men might learn of him to pray to him. What should we men dare to do without prayers, when he that was God would do nothing without them?

The very heathen poet could say, *A Jove principium;* and

[e] [De diversis Sermo XXXIII.]

which of those versemongers ever durst write a ballad without imploring of some deity? Which of the heathens durst attempt any great enterprise *insalutato numine*, without invocation and sacrifice? Saul himself would play the priest, and offer a burnt-offering to the Lord, rather than the Philistines should fight with him unsupplicated, as thinking any devotion better than none, and thinking it more safe to sacrifice without a priest than to fight without prayers. "Ungirt, unblest," was the old word, as not ready till they were girded, so not till they had prayed. And how dare we rush into the affairs of God or the state; how dare we thrust ourselves into actions, either perilous or important, without ever lifting up our eyes and hearts unto the God of heaven? except we would say, as the devilish malice of Surius slanders that zealous Luther, *Nec propter Deum hæc res cœpta est, nec propter Deum finietur, &c.* "This business was neither begun for God, nor shall be ended for him." How can God bless us if we implore him not? how can we prosper if he bless us not? how can we hope ever to be transfigured from a lump of corrupt flesh, if we do not ascend and pray? As the Samaritan woman said weakly, we may seriously, *The well* of mercies *is deep;* if thou hast *nothing to draw with*, never look to taste of the waters of life.

I fear the worst of men, Turks, and the worst Turks, the Moors, shall rise up in judgment against many Christians, with whom it is a just exception against any witness by their law, that he hath not prayed six times in each natural day. Before the day break they pray for day; when it is day, they give God thanks for day; at noon, they thank God for half the day past; after that, they pray for a good sunset; after that, they thank God for the day past; and lastly, pray for a good night after their day. And we Christians suffer so many suns and moons to rise and set upon our heads, and never lift up our hearts to their Creator and ours, either to ask his blessing or to acknowledge it!

Of all men under heaven, none had so much need to pray as courtiers. That which was done but once to Christ is always done to them; they are set upon the hill, and see the glory of the kingdoms of the earth. But I fear it is seen of them as it is with some of the mariners, the more need the less devotion.

Ye have seen the place, see the attendants. He would not have many, because he would not have it yet known to all;

hence was his intermination, and sealing up their mouths with a *Nemini dicite, Tell no man;* not none, because he would not have it altogether unknown, and afterwards would have it known to all.

Three were a legal number; *in ore duorum aut trium, in the mouth of two or three witnesses.* He had eternally possessed the glory of his Father without any witnesses; in time, the angels were blessed with that sight; and after that, two bodily yet heavenly witnesses were allowed, Enoch and Elias; now, in his humanity he was invested with glory, he takes but three witnesses, and those earthly and weak, Peter, James, John.

And why these? We may be too curious. Peter, because the eldest; John, because the dearest; James, because next Peter the zealousest; Peter, because he loved Christ most; John, because Christ most loved him; James, because next to both he loved, and was loved most. I had rather to have no reason, but *quia complacuit,* "because it so pleased him." Why may we not as well ask why he chose these twelve from others, as why he chose these three out of the twelve?

If any Romanists will raise from hence any privilege to Peter, which we could be well content to yield if that would make them ever the honester men, they must remember that they must take company with them, which these Pompeian spirits cannot abide. As good no privilege as any partners. And withal they must see him more taxed for his error in this act than honoured by his presence at the act, whereas the beloved disciple saw and erred not.

These same three, which were witnesses of his Transfiguration in the mount, were witnesses of his Agony in the garden, all three, and these three alone, were present at both, but both times sleeping. These were *arietes gregis,* "the bellwethers of the flock," as Austin calls them. O weak devotion of three great disciples! These were Paul's three *pillars,* οἱ στύλοι δοκοῦντες, Gal. ii. 9. Christ takes them up twice, once to be witnesses of his greatest glory, once of his greatest extremity; they sleep both times. The other was in the night, more tolerable; this by day, yea, in a light above day. Chrysostom would fain excuse it to be an amazedness, not a sleep, not considering that they slept both at that glory, and after; in the agony.

To see that Master praying, one would have thought should have fetched them on their knees; especially to see those hea-

venly affections look out at his eyes; to see his soul lifted up in his hands, in that transported fashion, to heaven. But now the hill hath wearied their limbs, their body clogs their soul, and they fall asleep. While Christ saw divine visions, they dreamed dreams; while he was in another world, ravished with the sight of his Father's glory, yea, of his own, they were in another world, a world of fancies, surprised with the cousin of death, sleep.

Besides so gracious an example, their own necessity (*quia incessanter pecco*, "because I continually sin," Bernard's reason,) might have moved them to pray rather than their Master; and behold, instead of fixing their eyes upon heaven, they shut them; instead of lifting up their hearts, their heads fall down upon their shoulders; and shortly here was snorting, instead of sighs and prayers.

This was not Abraham's or Elihu's ecstatical sleep, Job xxxiii; not the sleep of the Church, a waking sleep; but the plain sleep of the eyes: and not that תְּנוּמָה, a slumbering sleep, which David denies to himself, Psalm cxxxii. 4, but שֵׁנָה, a sound sleep, which Solomon forbids, Prov. vi. 4; yea, rather תַּרְדֵּמָה, the dead sleep of Adam or Jonas; and, as Bernard had wont to say, when he heard a monk snort, they did *carnaliter seu seculariter dormire.*

Prayer is an ordinary receipt for sleep. How prone are we to it when we should mind Divine things! Adam slept in Paradise, and lost a rib; but this sleep was of God's giving, and this rib was of God's taking. The good husbandman slept, and found tares. Eutychus slept, and fell. While Satan lulls us asleep, as he doth always rock the cradle when we sleep in our devotions, he ever takes some good from us, or puts some evil in us, or endangers us a deadly fall.

Away with this spiritual lethargy. Bernard had wont to say, that those which sleep are dead to men; those that are dead are asleep to God. But I say, those that sleep at church are dead to God; so we preach their funeral sermons, instead of hortatory. And as he was wont to say he lost no time so much as that wherein he slept; so let me add, there is no loss of time so desperate as of holy time. Think that Christ saith to thee at every sermon as he did to Peter, *Etiam, Petre, dormis? Sleepest thou, Peter? Couldst thou not wake with me one hour?* A

slumbering and a drowsy heart do not become the business and presence of him that keepeth Israel and slumbers not.

These were the attendants; see the companions of Christ. As our glory is not consummate without society, no more would Christ have his; therefore his Transfiguration hath two companions, Moses, Elias.

As St. Paul says of himself, *Whether in the body or out of the body, I know not, God knows;* so say I of these two.

Of Elijah there may seem less doubt, since we know that his body was assumed to heaven, and might as well come down for Christ's glory as go up for his own; although some grave authors, as Calvin, Œcolampadius, Bale, Fulk, have held his body with Enoch's resolved into their elements: *sed ego non credulus illis. Enoch translatus est in carne, et Elias carneus raptus est in cœlum,* &c. "Enoch was translated in the flesh, and Elias being yet in the flesh was taken into heaven," saith Jerome, in his Epistle[f] *ad Pammachium.*

And for Moses; though it be rare and singular, and Austin makes much scruple of it, yet why might not he after death return in his body to the glory of Christ's Transfiguration, as well as afterwards many of the saints did to the glory of his Resurrection? I cannot therefore, with the gloss, think there is any reason why Moses should take another, a borrowed body, rather than his own.

Heaven could not give two fitter companions, more admirable to the Jews for their miracles, more gracious with God for their faith and holiness: both of them admitted to the conference with God in Horeb; both of them types of Christ; both of them fasted forty days; both of them for the glory of God suffered many perils; both divided the waters; both the messengers of God to kings; both of them marvellous, as in their life, so in their end. A chariot of angels took away Elias; he was sought by the prophets, and not found: Michael strove with the devil for the body of Moses; he was sought for by the Jews, and not found: and now both of them are found here together on Tabor. This Elias shows himself to the Royal Prophet of his Church; this Moses shows himself to the true Michael: Moses, the publisher of the Law, Elias, the chief of the prophets, show themselves to the God of the Law and Prophets. *Alter populi infor-*

[f] [Ed. Paris. 1706. Tom. iv. Pars ii. p. 324.]

mator aliquando, alter reformator quandoque; "One, the informer once of the people; the other, the reformer sometimes," saith Tertull. in 4. *adver. Marcionem*[5]*: Alter initiator veteris testamenti, alter consummator novi;* "One, the first register of the old testament; the other, the shutter up of the new."

I verily think, with Hilary, that these two are pointed at as the forerunners of the second coming of Christ, as now they were the foretellers of his departure; neither doubt I that these are the *two witnesses* which are alluded to in the Apocalypse, howsoever divers of the fathers have thrust Enoch into the place of Moses. Look upon the place, Apoc. xi. 5, 6. Who but Elias can be he of whom is said, *If any man will hurt him, fire proceedeth out of his mouth, and devoureth his enemies,* alluding to 2 Kings i.? Who but Elias, of whom is said, *He hath power to shut the heaven, that it rain not in the days of his prophesying,* alluding to 1 Kings xviii.? Who but Moses, of whom it is said, *He hath power to turn the waters into blood, and smite the earth with all manner of plagues,* alluding to Exod. vii. and viii.? But take me aright: let me not seem a friend to the publicans of Rome, an abettor of those Alcoran-like fables of our popish doctors, who, not seeing the wood for trees, do *hærere in cortice,* "stick in the bark," taking all concerning that Antichrist according to the letter. *Odi, et arceo.* So shall Moses and Elias come again in those Witnesses, as Elias is already come in John Baptist: their spirits shall be in these Witnesses, whose bodies and spirits were witnesses both of the present glory and future passion of Christ.

Doubtless many thousand angels saw this sight, and were not seen; these two both saw and were seen. O how great an happiness was it for these two great prophets, in their glorified flesh to see their glorified Saviour, who before his Incarnation had spoken to them! to speak to that Man-God, of whom they were glorified, and to become prophets, not to men, but to God! And if Moses's face so shone before, when he spoke to him without a body in Mount Sinai, in the midst of the flames and clouds; how did it shine now, when, himself glorified, speaks to him a man in Tabor, in light and majesty! Elias hid his face before with a mantle when he passed by him in the rock; now with open face he beholds him present, and in his own glory adores his.

[5] [Tert. adv. Marc. ed. Antwerp. 1584. p. 857. C.]

Let that impudent Marcion, who ascribes the Law and Prophets to another God, and devises an hostility betwixt Christ and them, be ashamed to see Moses and Elias, not only *in colloquio*, but *in consortio claritatis;* not only "in conference," but "in a partnership of brightness," as Tertullian speaks, with Christ; whom if he had misliked, he had his choice of all the quire of heaven; and now choosing them, why were they not *in sordibus et tenebris*, "in rags and darkness?" *Sic inalienos demonstrat illos, dum secum habet; sic relinquendos docet, quos sibi jungit; sic destruit, quos de radiis suis exstruit*[h]; "So doth he show them far from strangeness to him, whom he hath with him; so doth he teach them to be forsaken, whom he joins with himself; so doth he destroy those, whom he graces with his beams of glory," saith that father.

His act verifies his word: *Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil them*, Matt. v. 17. O what consolation, what confirmation was this to the disciples, to see such examples of their future glory! such witnesses and adorers of the eternal Deity of their Master! They saw in Moses and Elias what they themselves should be. How could they ever fear to be miserable that saw such precedents of their ensuing glory? how could they fear to die, that saw in others the happiness of their own change?

The rich glutton pleads with Abraham, that *if one came to them from the dead they will amend:* Abraham answers, *They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.* Behold, here is both Moses and the prophets, and these too come from the dead: how can we now but be persuaded of the happy state of another world, unless we will make ourselves worse than the damned? See and consider, that the saints of God are not lost, but departed, gone into a far country with their Master, to return again richer and better than they went.

Lest we should think this the condition of Elias only, that was rapt into heaven, see here Moses matched with him, that died and was buried.

And is this the state of these two saints alone? shall none be seen with him in the Tabor of heaven, but those which have seen him in Horeb and Carmel? O thou weak Christian, was only one or two limbs of Christ's body glorious in the Transfiguration, or the

[h] [Tert. adv. Marc. ed. Antwerp. 1584. p. 857. C.]

whole? He is the Head, we are the members. If Moses and Elias were more excellent parts, tongue, or hand; let us be but heels or toes, his body is not perfect in glory without ours. *When Christ, which is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory,* Col. iii. 4. How truly may we say to death, *Rejoice not, mine enemy; though I fall, yet shall I rise;* yea, I shall rise in falling? *We shall not all sleep, we shall be changed,* saith St. Paul to his Thessalonians [Corinthians]. Elias was changed, Moses slept, both appeared; to teach us that neither our sleep nor change can keep us from appearing with him. When therefore thou shalt receive the sentence of death on Mount Nebo, or when the fiery chariot shall come and sweep thee from this vale of mortality, remember thy glorious reapparition with thy Saviour, and thou canst not but be comforted and cheerfully triumph over that last enemy, outfacing those terrors, with the assurance of a blessed resurrection to glory. To the which, &c.

THE SECOND PART OF THE MEDITATIONS UPON THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.

Matthew xvii; Mark ix; Luke ix.

IN A SERMON PREACHED AT WHITEHALL, BEFORE KING JAMES OF BLESSED MEMORY.

It falls out with this discourse as with Mount Tabor itself, that it is more easily climbed with the eye than with the foot: if we may not rather say of it as Josephus did of Sinai, that it doth not only *ascensus hominum*, but *aspectus fatigare;* "weary not only the steps, but the very sight of men."

We had thought not to spend many breaths in the skirts of the hill, the circumstances; and it hath cost us one hour's journey already, and we were glad to rest us, ere we can have left them below us. One pause more, I hope, will overcome them, and set us on the top.

No circumstance remains undiscussed but this one, What Moses and Elias did with Christ in their apparition. For they were not, as some sleepy attendants, like the three disciples in the beginning, to be there and see nothing; nor, as some silent spectators, mute witnesses, to see and say nothing: but as if their glory had no whit changed their profession, they are prophets still, and *foretold*

his departure, as St. Luke tells us: foretold, not to him which knew it before, yea which told it them; they could not have known it but for him, he was ὁ Λόγος, *the Word* of his Father: they told but that which he before had told his disciples; and now these heavenly witnesses tell it over again for confirmation. Like as John Baptist knew Christ before; he was *vox clamantis, the voice of a crier*, the other *Verbum Patris, the Word of his Father*. There is great affinity betwixt *vox* and *verbum;* yea, this voice had uttered itself clearly, *Ecce Agnus Dei, Behold the Lamb of God:* yet he sends his disciples with an, *Art thou he?* that he might confirm to them by him that which he both knew and had said of him. So our Saviour follows his forerunner in this, that what he knew and had told his disciples, the other Elias, the typical John Baptist, and Moses, must make good to their belief.

This ἐξόδος *departure* of Christ was σκληρὸς λόγος, *a word* both *hard* and *harsh;* hard to believe and harsh in believing. The disciples thought of nothing but a kingdom; a kingdom restored magnificently, interminably; and two of these three witnesses had so swallowed this hope, that they had put in for places in the state, to be his chief peers. How could they think of a parting? The Throne of David did so fill their eyes that they could not see his Cross; and if they must let down this pill, how bitter must it needs be! His presence was their joy and life; it was their death to think of his loss. Now therefore, that they might see that his sufferings and death were not of any sudden impotence, but predetermined in heaven, and revealed to the saints, two of the most noted saints in heaven shall second the news of his departure; and that in the midst of his Transfiguration: that they could not choose but think, "He that can be thus happy needs not be miserable; that Passion which he will undergo is not out of weakness, but out of love."

It is wittily noted by that sweet Chrysostom, that Christ never lightly spake of his Passion, but immediately before and after he did some great miracle; and here answerably, in the midst of his miraculous Transfiguration, the two saints speak of his Passion. A strange opportunity! In his highest exaltation to speak of his sufferings; to talk of Calvary in Tabor; when his head shone with glory, to tell him how it must bleed with thorns; when his face shone like the sun, to tell him it must be blubbered and spat upon; when his garments glistered with that celestial brightness, to tell him they must be stripped and divided; when he was

adored by the saints of heaven, to tell him how he must be scorned by the basest of men; when he was seen between two saints, to tell him how he must be seen between two malefactors: in a word, in the midst of his Divine Majesty, to tell him of his shame; and whilst he was transfigured in the mount, to tell him how he must be disfigured upon the Cross! Yet, these two heavenly prophets found this the fittest time for this discourse; rather choosing to speak of his sufferings in the height of his glory, than of his glory after his sufferings.

It is most seasonable, in our best to think of our worst estate: for both that thought will be best digested when we are well, and that change will be best prepared for when we are the farthest from it. You would perhaps think it unseasonable for me, in the midst of all your court-jollity to tell you of the days of mourning; and, with that great king, to serve in a death's-head amongst your royal dishes, to show your coffins in the midst of your triumphs: yet these precedents above exception show me that no time is so fit as this. Let me therefore say to you with the Psalmist, *I have said, Ye are gods:* if ye were transfigured in Tabor, could ye be more? *but ye shall die like men:* there is your ἔξοδος. It was a worthy and witty note of Jerome, on Isa. ii. 13, amongst all trees, the cedars are bidden to praise God, which are the tallest; and yet, *Dies Domini super omnes cedros Libani.* Ye gallants, whom a little yellow earth, and the webs of that curious worm have made gorgeous without, and perhaps proud within, remember, that ere long, as one worm decks you without, so another worm shall consume you within; and that both the earth that you prank up, and that earth wherewith you prank it, is running back into dust. Let not your high estate hide from you your fatal humiliation; let not your purples hide from you your windingsheet; but, even on the top of Tabor, think of the depth of the grave; think of your departure from men, while you are advanced above men.

We are now ascended to the top of the hill. Let us therefore stand, and see, and wonder at this great sight: as Moses to see *the bush flaming, and not consumed;* so we, to see the humanity continuing itself in the midst of these beams of glory.

Christ was ἐν μορφῇ δούλου, saith S. Paul, *in the form of a servant;* now for the time he was truly μεταμορφώθεις, *transformed:* that there is no cause why Maldonat should so inveigh against some of ours, yea of his own, as Jansenius, who translates

it *transformation:* for what is the external form but the figure? and their own Vulgar, as hotly as he takes it, reads it, Phil. ii. 7, *μορφὴν δούλου, formam servi accipiens.* There is no danger in this ambiguity. Not the substantial form, but the external fashion of Christ was changed. He having three forms, as Bernard distinguishes, *contemptam, splendidam, divinam,* changeth here the first into the second.

This is one of the rarest occurrences that ever befell the Saviour of the world. I am wont to reckon up these four principal wonders of his life, Incarnation, Temptation, Transfiguration, and Agony: the first, in the womb of the Virgin; the second, in the Wilderness; the third, in the Mount; the fourth, in the Garden: the first, that God should become man; the second, that God and man should be tempted and transported by Satan; the third, that man should be glorified upon earth; the last, that he, which was man and God, should sweat blood under the sense of God's wrath for man. And all these either had the angels for witnesses or the immediate voice of God. The first had angels singing; the second, angels ministering; the third, the voice of God thundering; the fourth, the angels comforting: that it may be no wonder the earth marvels at those things whereat the angels of heaven stand amazed.

Bernard makes three kinds of wonderful changes: *sublimitas in humilitatem,* "height to lowliness," when the Word took flesh; *contemptibilitas in majestatem,* when Christ transformed himself before his disciples; *mutabilitas in æternitatem,* when he rose again, and ascended to heaven to reign for ever. Ye see this is one of them; and as Tabor did rise out of the valley of Galilee, so this exaltation did rise out of the midst of Christ's humiliation.

Other marvels do increase his dejection, this only makes for his glory; and the glory of this is matchable with the humiliation of all the rest. That face, wherein before, saith Isaiah, *there was no form nor beauty,* now shines as the sun; that face, which men hid their faces from in contempt, now shines so that mortal eyes could not choose but hide themselves from the lustre of it, and immortal receive their beams from it. He had ever *in vultu sidereum quiddam,* as Jerome speaks, "a certain heavenly majesty and port in his countenance," which made his disciples follow him at first sight; but now, here was the perfection of supercelestial brightness. It was a miracle in the three children, that they so were delivered from the flames, that their very gar-

ments smelt not of the fire: it is no less miracle in Christ, that his very garments were dyed celestial, and did savour of his glory: like as Aaron was so anointed on his head and beard, that his skirts were all perfumed. His clothes therefore shined as snow, yea (that were but a waterish white) as light itself, saith St. Mark and Matthew in the most Greek copies. That seamless coat, as it had no welt, so it had no spot. The King's Son is all fair, even without. O excellent glory of his humanity! The best diamond or carbuncle is hid with a case; but this brightness pierceth through all his garments, and makes them lightsome in him, which use to conceal light in others. Herod put him on in mockage ἐσθῆτα λαμπρὰν, Luke xxiii. 11, not a white, but *a bright robe,* the ignorance whereof makes a show of disparity in the Evangelists: but God the Father, to glorify him, clothes his very garments with heavenly splendour. *Behold, thou art fair, my beloved; behold, thou art fair; and there is no spot in thee. Thine head is as fine gold, thy mouth is as sweet things, and thou art wholly delectable. Come forth, ye daughters of Sion, and behold king Solomon, with the crown wherewith his Father crowned him in the day of the gladness of his heart.*

O Saviour, if thou wert such in Tabor, what art thou in heaven? If this were the glory of thy humanity, what is the presence of thy Godhead?

Let no man yet wrong himself so much as to magnify this happiness as another's, and to put himself out of the participation of this glory. Christ is our Head, we are his members. As we all were in the first Adam, both innocent and sinning; so are we in the second Adam, both shining in Tabor and bleeding sweat in the garden.

And as we are already happy in him, so shall we be once in ourselves by and through him. *He shall change our vile bodies, that they may be like his glorious body.* Behold our pattern, and rejoice; *like his glorious body.* These very bodies, that are now cloddy like the earth, shall once be bright as the sun; and we, that now see clay in one another's faces, shall then see nothing but heaven in our countenances; and we, that now set forth our bodies with clothes, shall then be clothed upon with immortality out of the wardrobe of heaven. And if ever any painted face should be admitted to the sight of this glory, (as I much fear it; yea, I am sure God will have none but true faces in heaven,) they

would be ashamed to think that ever they had faces to daub with these beastly pigments, in comparison of this heavenly complexion. Let us therefore look upon this flesh, not so much with contempt of what it was and is, as with a joyful hope of what it shall be. And when our courage is assaulted with the change of these bodies from healthful to weak, from living to dead, let us comfort ourselves with the assurance of this change from dust to incorruption. We are not so sure of death as of transfiguration. *All the days of* our *appointed time* we *will therefore wait till* our *changing shall come.*

Now from the glory of the Master give me leave to turn your eyes to the error of the servant; who, having slept with the rest, and now suddenly awaking, knoweth not whether he slept still. To see such a light about him, three so glittering persons before him, made him doubt now, as he did after when he was carried by the angel through the iron gate, whether it were a pleasing dream or a real act. All slept, and now all waked: only Peter slept waking, and I know not whether more erred in his speech or in his sleep. It was a shame for a man to sleep in Tabor; but it is more a shame for a man to dream with his eyes open. Thus did Peter; *Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make us three tabernacles.*

I could well say, with Optatus, in this or any other occasion, *Ipsius Sancti Petri beatitudo veniam tribuat, dubito dicere peccasse tantam sanctitatem*[i]; "Let blessed Peter pardon me, I fear to say so great holiness offended." Yet since our adversaries are so overpartial to this worthy saint, in whom they have as little as they boast much, that they can be content his praise should blemish the dignity of all the rest, yea that God himself is in danger to be a loser by the advancement of so dear a servant; give me leave to lay my finger a little upon this blot. God would never have recorded that which it should be uncharitable for us to observe. It was the injurious kindness of Marcion, in honour of Peter, to leave out the story of Malchus, as Epiphanius notes[k]: it shall be our blame, if we do not so note, that we benefit ourselves even by his imperfections.

S. Mark's Gospel is said to be Peter's. O blessed apostle, can it be any wrong to say of thee that which thou hast written of thyself, not for insultation, not for exprobation? God forbid, but that men may be ashamed to give that to him which he hath

[i] [Adv. Parm. lib. vii.] [k] [Adv. Hær. l. i. tom. 3.]

denied to himself. Let me therefore not doubt to say, with reverence to so great a saint, that as he spake most, so he is noted to have erred most.

Not to meddle with his sinking, striking, judaizing; one while we find him carnally insinuating, another while carnally presuming; one while weakly denying, another while rashly misconstruing.

Carnally insinuating; *Master, favour thyself.* Which though some parasites of Rome would fain smooth up, that he in this showed his love to Christ, as before his faith out of St. Jerome and St. Austin; yet it must needs be granted which Bernard saith, *diligebat spiritum carnaliter*[1], "he loved the spirit in a carnal fashion." Let them choose whether they will admit Christ to have chid unjustly, or Peter worthy of chiding; except perhaps, with Hilary, they will stop where they should not; *Vade post me,* spoken to Peter in approbation, *Satana, non sapis quæ Dei sunt,* spoken to Satan in objurgation.

Carnally presuming; *Though all men, yet not I.* If he had not presumed of his strength to stand, he had not fallen. And as one yawning makes many open mouths, so did his vain resolution draw on company; *Likewise said the other disciples.*

For his weak denial, ye all know his simple negation, lined with an oath, faced with an imprecation.

And here that no man may need to doubt of an error, the Spirit of God saith, *He knew not what he said:* not only τί λαλήσῃ, as Mark, *what he should say;* but ὁ λέγει, saith Luke, *what he did speak:* whereof St. Mark gives the reason, ἦσαν ἔκφοβοι, *they were amazedly affrighted.* Amazedness may abate an error of speech, it cannot take it away. Besides astonishment here was a fervour of spirit, a love to Christ's glory and a delight in it: a fire, but misplaced on the top of the chimney, not on the hearth; *præmatura devotio,* as Ambrose speaks, "a devotion," but "rash" and heady. And if it had not been so, yet it is not in the power of a good intention to make a speech good. In this the matter failed; for what should such saints do in earthly tabernacles, in tabernacles of his making? And if he could be content to live there without a tent, (for he would have but three made,) why did he not much more conceive so of those heavenly guests? And if he spoke this to retain them, how weak was it to think their absence would be for want of house room? or how

[1] [De diversis Serm. CI.]

could that at once be which Moses and Elias had told him, and that which he wished? For how should Christ both depart at Jerusalem, and stay in the mount? Or if he would have their abode there to avoid the sufferings at Jerusalem, how did he yet again sing over that song for which he had heard before, *Come behind me, Satan?* or if it had been fit for Christ to have stayed there, how weakly doth he, which Chrysostom observes, equalize the servant with the master, the saints with God! In a word, the best and the worst that can be said here of Peter is, that which the Psalmist saith of Moses, יְבַטֵּא *effutiit labiis, he spake unadvisedly with his lips*, Psalm cvi. 33.

Yet if any earthly place or condition might have given warrant to Peter's motion, this was it. Here was a hill, the emblem of heaven; here were two saints, the epitome of heaven; here was Christ, the God of heaven.

And if Peter might not say so of this, how shall we say of any other place, *Bonum est esse hic*, "It is good to be here?" Will ye say of the country, *Bonum est esse hic?* there is a melancholy dulness, privacy, toil. Will you say of the court, *Bonum est esse hic?* there dwells ambition, secret undermining, attendance, serving of humours and times. Will ye say of the city, *Bonum est esse hic?* there you find continual tumult, usury, cozenage in bargains, excess, and disorder. Get you to the wilderness, and say, "It is good to be here:" even there evils will find us out. *In nemore habitat lupus*, saith Bernard, "In the wood dwells the wolf." Weariness and sorrow dwell everywhere.

The rich man wallows amongst his heaps, and when he is in his counting-house, beset with piles of bags, he can say, *Bonum est esse hic:* he worships these molten images; his gold is his god, his heaven is his chest: not thinking of that which Tertullian notes, *Aurum ipsum quibusdam gentibus ad vincla servire*[m], "That some countries make their very fetters of gold:" yea so doth he, whilst he admires it, making himself the slave to his servant; *Damnatus ad metalla*, as the old Roman punishment was. *Coacta servitus miserabilior, affectata miserior;* "Forced bondage is more worthy of pity, affected bondage is more miserable. And if God's hand touch him never so little, can his gold bribe a disease? can his bags keep his head from aching or the gout from his joints? or doth his loathing stomach make a difference betwixt an earthen and a silver dish? O vain desires and impotent con-

[m] [De Cultu fœm. l. ii. c. 10.]

tentments of men, who place happiness in that which doth not only not save them from evils, but help to make them miserable! Behold their wealth feeds them with famine, recreates them with toil, cheers them with cares, blesses them with torments; and yet they say, *Bonum est esse hic.* How are their sleeps broken with cares! how are their hearts broken with losses! Either riches have wings, which in the clipping or pulling fly away and take them to heaven, or else their souls have wings (*Stulte, hac nocte, Thou fool, this night*) and fly from their riches to hell. *Non dominus, sed colonus,* saith Seneca[n], "Not the lord, but the farmer." So that here are both perishing riches and a perishing soul. *Uncertainty of riches,* as St. Paul to his Timothy, and certainty of misery. And yet these vain men say, *Bonum est esse hic.*

The man of honour, that I may use Bernard's phrase, that hath Ahasuerus's proclamation made before him, which knows he is not only τίς μέγας, *a certain great man,* as Simon affected, but ὁ ἀνήρ, "the man," which Demosthenes was proud of, that sees all heads bare, and all knees bent to him, that finds himself out of the reach of envy, on the pitch of admiration, says, *Bonum est esse hic.* Alas! how little thinks he of that which that good man said to his Eugenius, *Non est quod blandiatur celsitudo, ubi solicitudo major*[o]; "What care we for the fawning of that greatness which is attended with more care?" King Henry the Seventh's emblem in all his buildings (in the windows) was still a crown in a bush of thorns: I know not with what historical allusion; but sure, I think, to imply that great places are not free from great cares. Saul knew what he did, when he hid himself among the stuff. No man knoweth the weight of a sceptre but he that swayeth it. As for subordinate greatness, it hath so much less worth as it hath more dependence. How many sleepless nights and restless days and busy shifts doth their ambition cost them that affect eminence! Certainly, no men are so worthy of pity as they whose height thinks all other worthy of contempt. High places are slippery; and as it is easy to fall, so the ruin is deep, and the recovery difficult. *Altiorem locum sortitus es, non tutiorem; sublimiorem, sed non securiorem,* saith Bernard; "Thou hast got a higher place, but not a safer; a loftier, but not more secure." *Aulæ culmen lubricum,* "The slippery ridge of the court," was the old title of honour. David's curse was, *Fiat via eorum tenebræ et lubricum,* "Let their way be made dark and

[n] [De Benef. l. vii. c. 5.] [o] [De Consid. ad Eugen. III. Papam. l. ii. c. 5.]

slippery." What difference is there betwixt his curse and the happiness of the ambitious, but this, that the way of the one is dark and slippery, the way of the other lightsome and slippery? that dark, that they may fall; this light, that they may see and be seen to fall. Please yourselves, then, ye great ones, and let others please you in the admiration of your height. But if your goodness do not answer your greatness, *sera querela est, quoniam elevans allisisti me,* "it is a late complaint, thou hast lift me up to cast me down." Your ambition hath but set you up a scaffold, that your misery might be more notorious. And yet these clients of honour say, *Bonum est esse hic.*

The pampered glutton, when he seeth his table spread with full bowls, with costly dishes and curious sauces, the dainties of all three elements, says, *Bonum est esse hic.* And yet eating hath a satiety, and satiety a weariness. His heart is never more empty of contentment than when his stomach is fullest of delicacies. When he is empty, he is not well till he be filled; when he is full, he is not well till he have got a stomach, *et momentanea blandimenta gulæ stercoris fine condemnat,* saith Jerome; "and condemns all the momentary pleasures of his maw to the dunghill." And when he sits at his *feasts of marrow and fat things,* as the prophet speaks, *his table,* according to the Psalmist's imprecation, is *made his snare;* a true snare every way. His soul is caught in it with excess; his estate with penury; his body with diseases. Neither doth he more plainly tear his meat in pieces with his teeth than he doth himself; and yet this vain man says, *Bonum est esse hic.*

The petulant wanton thinks it the only happiness that he may have his full scope to filthy dalliance. Little would he so do if he could see his strumpet as she is; her eyes the eyes of a cockatrice, her hairs snakes, her painted face the visor of a fury, her heart snares, her hands bands, and her end wormwood, consumption of the flesh, destruction of the soul, and the flames of lust ending in the flames of hell. Since therefore neither pleasures nor honour nor wealth can yield any true contentment to their best favourites, let us not be so unwise as to speak of this vale of misery, as Peter did of the hill of Tabor, *Bonum est esse hic.*

And if the best of earth cannot do it, why will ye seek it in the worst? How dare any of you great ones seek to purchase contentment with oppression, sacrilege, bribery; outfacing innocence and truth with power; damning your own souls for but the humouring of a few miserable days? *Filii hominum, usquequo gravi*

corde? ad quid diligitis vanitatem, et quæritis mendacium? O ye sons of men, how long, &c.

But that which moved Peter's desire, though with imperfection, shows what will perfect our desire and felicity: for if a glimpse of this heavenly glory did so ravish this worthy disciple, that he thought it happiness enough to stand by and gaze upon it; how shall we be affected with the contemplation, yea fruition of the Divine presence? Here was but Tabor, there is heaven; here were but two saints, there many millions of saints and angels; here was Christ transfigured, there he sits at the right-hand of Majesty; here was a representation, there a gift and possession of blessedness. O that we could now forget the world, and, fixing our eyes upon this better Tabor, say, *Bonum est esse hic.*

Alas! this life of ours, if it were not short, yet it is miserable; and if it were not miserable, yet it is short. Tell me, ye that have the greatest command on earth, whether this vile world have ever afforded you any sincere contentation. The world is your servant: if it were your parasite, yet could it make you heartily merry? Ye delicatest courtiers, tell me, if pleasure itself have not an unpleasant tediousness hanging upon it, and more sting than honey?

And whereas all happiness, even here below, is in the vision of God; how is our spiritual eye hindered, as the body is from his object, by darkness, by false light, by aversion! Darkness; he that doth sin is in darkness: false light; whilst we measure eternal things by temporary: aversion; while, as weak eyes hate the light, we turn our eyes from the true and immutable good to the fickle and uncertain.

We are not on the hill, but in the valley; where we have tabernacles, not of our own making, but of clay; and such as wherein we are witnesses of Christ, not transfigured in glory, but blemished with dishonour, dishonoured with oaths and blasphemies, recrucified with our sins; witnesses of God's saints, not shining in Tabor, but mourning in darkness, and, instead of that heavenly brightness, clothed with sackcloth and ashes. Then and there we shall have *tabernacles not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, where we shall see how sweet the Lord is: we shall see the triumphs of Christ; we shall hear and sing the hallelujahs of saints.

Quæ nunc nos angit vesania vitiorum sitire absinthium, &c. saith that devout Father. O how hath our corruption bewitched us to thirst for this wormwood, to affect the shipwrecks of this

world, to dote upon the misery of this fading life; and not rather to fly up to the felicity of saints, to the society of angels, to that blessed contemplation wherein we shall see God in himself, God in us, ourselves in him!

There shall be no sorrow, no pain, no complaint, no fear, no death. There is no malice to rise against us, no misery to afflict us, no hunger, thirst, weariness, temptation to disquiet us. There, O there, one day is better than a thousand; there is rest from our labours, peace from our enemies, freedom from our sins. How many clouds of discontentment darken the sunshine of our joy while we are here below: *Væ nobis, qui vivimus plangere quæ pertulimus, dolere quæ sentimus, timere quæ expectamus!* Complaint of evils past, sense of present, fear of future, have shared our lives amongst them. Then shall we be *semper læti, semper satiati*, "always joyful, always satisfied," with the vision of that God, *in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

Shall we see that heathen Cleombrotus abandoning his life and casting himself down from the rock upon an uncertain noise of immortality; and shall not we Christians abandon the wicked superfluities of life, the pleasures of sin, for that life which we know more certainly than this? What stick we at, my beloved? Is there a heaven, or is there none? Have we a Saviour there, or have we none? We know there is a heaven, as sure as that there is an earth below us; we know we have a Saviour there, as sure as there are men that we converse with upon earth; we know there is happiness, as sure as we know there is misery and mutability upon earth. O our miserable sottishness and infidelity, if we do not contemn the best offers of the world, and lifting up our eyes and hearts to heaven, say, *Bonum est esse hic!*

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. To Him that hath purchased and prepared this glory for us, together with the Father and blessed Spirit, one incomprehensible God, be all praise for ever. Amen.

THE PROSECUTION OF THE TRANSFIGURATION.

Matthew xvii; Mark ix; Luke ix.

Before the disciples' eyes were dazzled with glory, now the brightness of that glory is shaded with a cloud. Frail and feeble eyes of mortality cannot look upon an heavenly lustre.

That cloud imports both majesty and obscuration.

Majesty; for it was the testimony of God's presence of old: the cloud covered the mountain, the tabernacle, the oracle. He that makes the clouds his chariot, was in a cloud carried up into heaven. Where have we mention of any divine representation but a cloud is one part of it? What comes nearer to heaven either in place or resemblance?

Obscuration; for as it showed there was a majesty, and that divine; so it showed them that the view of that majesty was not for bodily eyes. Like as when some great prince walks under a canopy, that veil shows there is a great person under it, but withal restrains the eye from a free sight of his person. And if the cloud were clear, yet it shaded them. Why then was this cloud interposed betwixt that glorious vision and them, but for a check of their bold eyes?

Had they too long gazed upon this resplendent spectacle, as their eyes had been blinded, so their hearts had perhaps grown to an over-bold familiarity with that heavenly object. How seasonably doth the cloud intercept it! The wise God knows our need of these vicissitudes and allays. If we have a light, we must have a cloud; if a light to cheer us, we must have a cloud to humble us. It was so in Sinai, it was so in Sion, it was so in Olivet, it shall never be but so. The natural day and night do not more duly interchange than this light and cloud. Above we shall have the light without the cloud, a clear vision and fruition of God, without all dim and sad interpositions; below we cannot be free from these mists and clouds of sorrow and misapprehension.

But this was a *bright cloud.* There is a difference betwixt the cloud in Tabor and that in Sinai: this was clear, that darksome. There is darkness in the Law, there is light in the grace of the Gospel. Moses was there spoken to in darkness, here he was spoken with in light. In that dark cloud there was terror, in this there was comfort. Though it were a cloud then, yet it was bright; and though it were bright, yet it was a cloud: with much light there was some shade. God would not speak to them concerning Christ out of darkness, neither yet would he manifest himself to them in an absolute brightness. All his appearances have this mixture. What need I other instance than in these two saints? Moses spake oft to God mouth to mouth, yet not so immediately but that there was ever somewhat drawn as a curtain betwixt God and him, either fire in Horeb or smoke in Sinai; so as his face was not more veiled from the people than God's from

him. Elias shall be spoken to by God, but in a rock, and under a mantle. In vain shall we hope for any revelation from God but in a cloud. Worldly hearts are in utter darkness, they see not so much as the least glimpse of these divine beams, not a beam of that inaccessible light. The best of his saints see him here but in a cloud, or in a glass. Happy are we if God have honoured us with these divine representations of himself. Once, *in his light we shall see light.*

I can easily think with what amazedness these three disciples stood compassed in that bright cloud, expecting some miraculous event of so heavenly a vision; when suddenly they might hear a voice sounding out of that cloud, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him.* They need not be told whose that voice was; the place, the matter evinced it. No angel in heaven could or durst have said so. How gladly doth Peter afterwards recount it! *For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son,* &c.

It was only the ear that was here taught, not the eye. As of Horeb, so of Sinai, so of Tabor, might God say, *Ye saw no shape nor image in that day that the Lord spake unto you.* He that knows our proneness to idolatry avoids those occasions which we might take to abuse our own fancies.

Twice hath God spoken these words to his own Son from heaven; once in his baptism, and now again in his transfiguration. Here, not without some oppositive comparison; not Moses, not Elias, but *This.* Moses and Elias were servants; this, a *Son;* Moses and Elias were sons, but of grace and choice; this is *that Son,* the Son by nature. Other sons are *beloved,* as of favour and free election; this is *The beloved,* as in the unity of his essence. Others are so beloved, that he is pleased with themselves; this so beloved, that *in* and for *him* he is *pleased* with mankind. As the relation betwixt the Father and the Son is infinite, so is the love. We measure the intension of love by the extension: the love that rests in the person affected alone is but strait; true love descends, like Aaron's ointment, from the head to the skirts; to children, friends, allies. O incomprehensibly large love of God the Father to the Son, that for his sake he is pleased with the world! O perfect and happy complacence! Out of Christ, there is nothing but enmity betwixt God and the soul; in him, there can be nothing but peace. When the beams

are met in one centre, they do not only heat, but burn. Our weak love is diffused to many; God hath some, the world more; and therein wives, children, friends: but this infinite love of God hath all the beams of it united in one only object, the Son of his love. Neither doth he love any thing but in the participation of his love, in the derivation from it. O God, let me be found in Christ, and how canst thou but be pleased with me?

This one voice proclaims Christ at once the Son of God, the Reconciler of the world, the Doctor and Lawgiver of his Church. As the Son of God, he is essentially interested in his love; as he is the Reconciler of the world, in whom God is well pleased, he doth most justly challenge our love and adherence; as he is the Doctor and Lawgiver, he doth justly challenge our audience, our obedience. Even so, Lord, teach us to hear and obey thee as our Teacher; to love thee and believe in thee as our Reconciler; and, as the eternal Son of thy Father, to adore thee.

The light caused wonder in the disciples; but the voice astonishment. They are all fallen down upon their faces. Who can blame a mortal man to be thus affected with the voice of his Maker? Yet this word was but plausible and hortatory. O God, how shall flesh and blood be other than swallowed up with the horror of thy dreadful sentence of death? *The lion shall roar, who shall not be afraid?* How shall those that have slighted the sweet voice of thine invitations call to the rocks to hide them from the terror of thy judgments!

The God of mercies pities our infirmities. I do not hear our Saviour say, "Ye lay sleeping one while upon the earth; now ye lie astonished: ye could neither wake to see nor stand to hear; now lie still and tremble." But he graciously touches and comforts them; *Arise, fear not.* That voice, which shall once raise them up out of the earth, might well raise them up from it. That hand, which by the least touch restored sight, limbs, life, might well restore the spirits of the dismayed. O Saviour, let that sovereign hand of thine touch us when we lie in the trances of our griefs, in the bed of our securities, in the grave of our sins, and we shall arise.

They, looking up, saw no man, save Jesus alone; and that doubtless in his wonted form. All was now gone; Moses, Elias, the cloud, the voice, the glory: Tabor itself cannot be long blessed with that divine light and those shining guests. Heaven will not allow to earth any long continuance of glory. Only above

is constant happiness to be looked for and enjoyed; where we shall ever see our Saviour in his unchangeable brightness; where the light shall never be either clouded or varied.

Moses and Elias are gone; only Christ is left. The glory of the Law and the Prophets was but temporary, yea momentary, that only Christ may remain to us entire and conspicuous. They came but to give testimony to Christ; when that is done, they are vanished.

Neither could these raised disciples find any miss of Moses and Elias, when they had Christ still with them. Had Jesus been gone, and left either Moses or Elias, or both, in the mount with his disciples, that presence, though glorious, could not have comforted them: now that they are gone, and he is left, they cannot be capable of discomfort. O Saviour, it matters not who is away while thou art with us. Thou art God All-sufficient: what can we want when we want not thee? Thy presence shall make Tabor itself an heaven; yea, hell itself cannot make us miserable with the fruition of thee.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY.—John viii.

What a busy life was this of Christ's! He spent the night in the Mount of Olives, the day in the temple: whereas the night is for a retired repose, the day for company. His retiredness was for prayer; his companionableness was for preaching: all night he watches in the mount; all the morning he preaches in the temple. It was not for pleasure that he was here upon earth; his whole time was penal and toilsome. How do we resemble him, if his life were all pain and labour, ours all pastime?

He found no such fair success the day before: *The multitude was divided in their opinion of him;* messengers were sent and suborned to apprehend him: yet he returns to the temple. It is for the sluggard or the coward to plead *a lion in the way:* upon the calling of God we must overlook and contemn all the spite and opposition of men. Even after an ill harvest we must sow; and after denials we must woo for God.

This Sun of righteousness prevents that other, and shines early with wholesale doctrines upon the souls of his hearers.

The auditory is both thronged and attentive; yet not all with

the same intentions. If the people came to learn, the scribes and Pharisees came to cavil and carp at his teaching.

With what a pretence of zeal and justice yet do they put themselves into Christ's presence! As lovers of chastity and sanctimony, and haters of uncleanness, *they bring to him a woman taken in* the flagrance of her *adultery.*

And why the woman rather? since the man's offence was equal, if not more; because he should have had more strength of resistance, more grace not to tempt. Was it out of necessity? Perhaps the man, knowing his danger, made use of his strength to shift away, and violently brake from his apprehenders. Or was it out of cunning? in that they hoped for more likely matter to accuse Christ in the case of the woman than of the man; for that they supposed his merciful disposition might more probably incline to compassionate her weakness rather than the stronger vessel. Or was it rather out of partiality? Was it not then, as now, that the weakest soonest suffers, and impotency lays us open to the malice of an enemy? Small flies hang in the webs, while wasps break through without control. The wand and the sheet are for poor offenders; the great either outface or outbuy their shame. A beggarly drunkard is hauled to the stocks, while the rich is chambered up, to sleep out his surfeit.

Out of these grounds is the woman brought to Christ: not to the Mount of Olives, not to the way, not to his private lodging, but to the temple; and that, not to some obscure angle, but into the face of the assembly.

They pleaded for her death. The punishment, which they would onwards inflict, was her shame; which must needs be so much more, as there were more eyes to be witnesses of her guiltiness. All the brood of sin affects darkness and secrecy, but this more properly; the twilight, the night, is for the adulterer. It cannot be better fitted than to be dragged out into the light of the sun, and to be proclaimed with hootings and bassoons. O the impudence of those men, who can make merry professions of their own beastliness, and boast of the shameful trophies of their lust!

Methinks I see this miserable adulteress, how she stands confounded amidst that gazing and disdainful multitude; how she hides her head; how she wipes her blubbered face and weeping eyes.

In the mean time, it is no dumb show that is here acted by

these scribes and Pharisees. They step forth boldly to her accusation; *Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*

How plausibly do they begin! Had I stood by and heard them, should I not have said, "What holy, honest, conscionable men are these! What devout clients of Christ! With what reverence they come to him! With what zeal of justice!" When he that made and ransacks their bosom tells me, *All this is done but to tempt him.* Even the falsest hearts will have the plausiblest mouths: like to Solomon's courtesan, *their lips drop as an honeycomb, and their mouth is smoother than oil; but their end is bitter as wormwood.*

False and hollow Pharisees! He is your Master whom ye serve; not he whom ye tempt: only in this shall he be approved your Master, that he shall pay your wages, and give you your portion with hypocrites.

The act of adultery was her crime: to be taken in the very act was no part of her sin, but the proof of her just conviction; yet her deprehension is made an aggravation of her shame. Such is the corrupt judgment of the world. To do ill troubles not men, but to be taken in doing it: unknown filthiness passes away with ease; it is the notice that perplexes them, not the guilt. But, O foolish sinners, all your packing and secrecy cannot so contrive it but that ye shall be taken in the manner: your conscience takes you so; the God of heaven takes you so; and ye shall once find that your conscience is more than a thousand witnesses, and God more than a thousand consciences.

They that complain of the act, urge the punishment. *Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned.* Where did Moses bid so? Surely the particularity of this execution was without the book; tradition and custom enacted it; not the law. Indeed Moses commanded death to both the offenders; not the manner of death to either. By analogy it holds thus: it is flatly commanded, in the case of a damsel betrothed to an husband, and found not to be a virgin; in the case of a damsel betrothed, who being defiled in the city cried not: tradition and custom made up the rest; obtaining out of this ground, that all adulterers should be executed by lapidation. The ancienter punishment was burning; death always, though in diverse forms. I shame to think that Christians should slight that sin which both Jews and pagans held ever deadly.

What a mis-citation is this! *Moses commanded.* The law was God's, not Moses's. If Moses were employed to mediate betwixt God and Israel, the law is never the more his. He was the hand of God, to reach the law to Israel; the hand of Israel, to take it from God. We do not name the water from the pipes, but from the spring. It is not for a true Israelite to rest in the second means, but to mount up to the supreme Original of justice. How reverent soever an opinion was had of Moses, he cannot be thus named without a shameful undervaluing of the royal law of his Maker. There is no mortal man whose authority may not grow into contempt; that of the everliving God cannot but be ever sacred and inviolable. It is now with the Gospel as it was then with the Law: the word is no other than Christ's, though delivered by our weakness; whosoever be the crier, the proclamation is the King's of heaven. While it goes for ours, it is no marvel if it lie open to despite.

How captious a word is this! Moses said thus, *what sayest thou?* If they be not sure that Moses said so, why do they affirm it? and if they be sure, why do they question that which they know decided? They would not have desired a better advantage than a contradiction to that received Lawgiver. It is their profession, *We are Moses' disciples;* and, *We know that God spake to Moses.* It had been quarrel enough to oppose so known a prophet. Still, I find it the drift of the enemies of truth, to set Christ and Moses together by the ears; in the matter of the sabbath, of circumcision, of marriage and divorce, of the use of the law, of justification by the law, of the sense and extent of the law, and where not? But they shall never be able to effect it: they two are fast and indissoluble friends, on both parts, for ever; each speaks for other, each establishes other: they are subordinate; they cannot be opposite: Moses faithful as a servant; Christ as a Son. A faithful servant cannot be but officious to the Son. The true use we make of Moses is, to be our schoolmaster to teach us, to whip us unto Christ; the true use we make of Christ is, to supply Moses. *By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.* Thus must we hold in with both, if we will have our part in either: so shall Moses bring us to Christ, and Christ to glory.

Had these Pharisees, out of simplicity and desire of resolution in a case of doubt, moved this question to our Saviour, it had been no less commendable than now it is blameworthy.

O Saviour, whither should we have recourse but to thine oracle? Thou art the Word of the Father, the Doctor of the Church. While we hear from others, "What say Fathers? what say Councils?" let them hear from us, *What sayest thou?*

But here it was far otherwise: they came, not to learn, but to tempt; and to tempt, that they might accuse. Like their father the devil, who solicits to sin, that he may plead against us for yieldance, fain would these colloguing adversaries draw Christ to contradict Moses, that they might take advantage of his contradiction. On the one side, they saw his readiness to tax the false glosses which their presumptuous doctors had put upon the law, with an, *I say unto you;* on the other, they saw his inclination to mercy and commiseration in all his courses, so far as to neglect even some circumstances of the law, as, to touch the leper, to heal on the sabbath, to eat with known sinners, to dismiss an infamous but penitent offender, to select and countenance two noted publicans; and hereupon they might perhaps think that his compassion might draw him to cross this Mosaical institution.

What a crafty bait is here laid for our Saviour! Such as he cannot bite at and not be taken. It seems to them impossible he should avoid a deep prejudice either to his justice or mercy: for thus they imagine; "Either Christ will second Moses, in sentencing this woman to death; or else he will cross Moses, in dismissing her unpunished. If he command her to be stoned, he loses the honour of his clemency and mercy; if he appoint her dismission, he loses the honour of his justice." Indeed, strip him of either of these, and he can be no Saviour.

O the cunning folly of vain men, that hope to beguile wisdom itself!

Silence and neglect shall first confound those men, whom, after, his answer will send away convicted. Instead of opening his mouth, our Saviour bows his body; and, instead of returning words from his lips, writes characters on the ground with his fingers. O Saviour, I had rather silently wonder at thy gesture than inquire curiously into the words thou wrotest or the mysteriesof thus writing; only, herein I see thou meantest to show a disregard to these malicious and busy cavillers. Sometimes, taciturnity and contempt are the best answers. Thou, that hast bidden us *be wise as serpents* givest us this noble example of thy prudence. It was most safe that these tempters should be thus kept fasting with a silent disrespect, that their eagerness might justly draw upon them an ensuing shame.

The more unwillingness they saw in Christ to give his answer, the more pressive and importunate they were to draw it from him. Now, as forced by their so zealous irritation, our Saviour rouseth up himself, and gives it them home with a reprehensory and stinging satisfaction; *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her:* as if his very action had said, "I was loath to have shamed you, and therefore could have been willing not to have heard your ill-meant motion; but since you will needs have it, and by your vehemence force my justice, I must tell you, there is not one of you but is as faulty as she whom ye accuse: there is no difference, but that your sin is smothered in secrecy, hers is brought forth into the light. Ye had more need to make your own peace by an humble repentance, than to urge severity against another. I deny not but Moses hath justly from God imposed the penalty of death upon such heinous offences; but what then would become of you? If death be her due, yet not by those your unclean hands; your hearts know you are not honest enough to accuse."

Lo, not the bird, but the fowler is taken. He says not, "Let her be stoned;" this had been against the course of his mercy: he says not, "Let her not be stoned;" this had been against the law of Moses. Now he so answers that both his justice and mercy are entire; she dismissed, they shamed.

It was the manner of the Jews, in those heinous crimes that were punished with lapidation, that the witnesses and accusers should be the first that should lay hands upon the guilty; well doth our Saviour therefore choke these accusers with the conscience of their so foul incompetency. With what face, with what heart could they stone their own sin in another person?

Honesty is too mean a term. These scribes and Pharisees were noted for extraordinary and admired holiness. The outside of their lives was not only inoffensive, but saintlike and exemplary. Yet that allseeing eye of the Son of God, which *found folly in the angels*, hath much more found wickedness in these glorious professors. It is not for nothing that *his eyes are like a flame of fire*. What secret is there which he searches not? Retire yourselves, O ye foolish sinners, into your inmost closets; yea, if you can, into the centre of the earth; his eye follows you, and observes all your carriages: no bolt, no bar, no darkness can keep him out. No thief was ever so impudent as to steal in the

very face of the Judge. O God, let me see myself seen by thee, and I shall not dare to offend.

Besides notice, here is exprobration. These mens' sins, as they had been secret, so they were forgotten. It is long since they were done; neither did they think to have heard any more news of them. And now, when time and security had quite worn them out of thought, He, that shall once be their Judge, calls them to a back reckoning. One time or other shall that just God lay our sins in our dish, and make us possess the sins of our youth. *These things thou didst, and I kept silence; and thou thoughtest I was like unto thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee.* The penitent man's sin lies before him for his humiliation, the impenitent's for his shame and confusion.

The act of sin is transient, not so the guilt; that will stick by us, and return upon us, either in the height of our security, or the depth of our misery, when we shall be least able to bear it. How just may it be with God to take us at advantages, and then to lay his arrest upon us when we are laid up upon a former suit!

It is but just there should be a requisition of innocence in them that prosecute the vices of others. The offender is worthy of stoning, but who shall cast them? How ill would they become hands as guilty as her own! What do they but smite themselves who punish their own offences in other men? Nothing is more unjust or absurd than for the beam to censure the mote, the oven to upbraid the kiln. It is a false and vagrant zeal that begins not first at home.

Well did our Saviour know how bitter and strong a pill he had given to these false justiciaries; and now he will take leisure to see how it wrought. While therefore he gives time to them to swallow it and put it over, he returns to his old gesture of a seeming inadvertency.

How sped the receipt? I do not see any one of them stand out with Christ, and plead his own innocency; and yet these men, which is very remarkable, placed the fulfilling or violation of the law only in the outward act. Their hearts misgave them, that if they should have stood out in contestation with Christ, he would have utterly shamed them, by displaying their old and secret sins; and have so convinced them by undeniable circumstances, that they should never have clawed off the reproach; *And* therefore,

when they heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last.

There might seem to be some kind of mannerly order in this guilty departure; not all at once, lest they should seem violently chased away by this charge of Christ; now their slinking away one by one may seem to carry a show of a deliberate and voluntary discession. The eldest first; the ancienter is fitter to give than take example; and the younger could think it no shame to follow the steps of a grave foreman.

O wonderful power of conscience! Man can no more stand out against it than it can stand out against God. The Almighty, whose substitute is set in our bosom, sets it on work to accuse. It is no denying when that says we are guilty; when that condemns us, in vain are we acquitted by the world. With what bravery did these hypocrites come to set upon Christ! with what triumph did they insult upon that guilty soul! Now they are thunderstruck with their own conscience, and drop away confounded; and well is he that can run away farthest from his own shame. No wicked man needs to seek out of himself for a judge, accuser, witness, tormentor.

No sooner do these hypocrites hear of their sins from the mouth of Christ than they are gone. Had they been sincerely touched with a true remorse, they would have rather come to him upon their knees, and have said, "Lord, we know and find that thou knowest our secret sins. This argues thy Divine Omniscience. Thou that art able to know our sins art able to remit them. O pardon the iniquities of thy servants. Thou that accusest us, do thou also acquit us." But now, instead hereof, they turn their back upon their Saviour, and haste away. An impenitent man cares not how little he hath either of the presence of God or of the mention of his sins. O fools! if ye could run away from God, it were somewhat; but while ye move in him, what do ye? whither go ye? Ye may run from his mercy, ye cannot but run upon his judgment.

Christ is left alone. Alone, in respect of these complainants; not alone, in respect of the multitude. There yet stands the mournful adulteress. She might have gone forth with them; nobody constrained her to stay: but that which sent them away stayed her, conscience. She knew her guiltiness was publicly accused, and durst not be by herself denied; as one that was

therefore fastened there by her own guilty heart, she stirs not till she may receive a dismission.

Our Saviour was not so busy in writing but that he read the while the guilt and absence of those accusers. He that knew what they had done, knew no less what they did, what they would do. Yet, as if the matter had been strange to him, *he lifts up himself, and says, Woman, where are thy accusers?*

How well was this sinner to be left there! Could she be in a safer place than before the tribunal of a Saviour? Might she have chosen her refuge, whither should she rather have fled? O happy we, if, when we are convinced in ourselves of our sins, we can set ourselves before that Judge, who is our Surety, our Advocate, our Redeemer, our Ransom, our Peace.

Doubtless, she stood doubtful betwixt hope and fear; hope, in that she saw her accusers gone; fear, in that she knew what she had deserved; and now, while she trembled in expectation of a sentence, she hears, *Woman, where are thy accusers?* Wherein our Saviour intends the satisfaction of all the hearers, of all the beholders; that they might apprehend the guiltiness, and therefore the unfitness, of the accusers; and might well see there was no warrantable ground of his further proceeding against her.

Two things are necessary for the execution of a malefactor; evidence, sentence: the one from witnesses, the other from the judge. Our Saviour asks for both. The accusation and proof must draw on the sentence; the sentence must proceed upon the evidence of the proof; *Where are thy accusers? hath no man condemned thee?*

Had sentence passed legally upon the adulteress, doubtless our Saviour would not have acquitted her; for as he would not intrude upon others' offices, so he would not cross or violate the justice done by others. But now finding the coast clear, he says, *Neither do I condemn thee.*

What, Lord! dost thou then show favour to foul offenders? Art thou rather pleased that gross sins should be blanched, and sent away with a gentle connivancy? Far, far be this from the perfection of thy justice. He that hence argues adulteries not punishable by death, let him argue the unlawfulness of dividing of inheritances, because in the case of the two wrangling brethren thou saidst, *Who made me a divider of inheritances?* Thou declinedst the office; thou didst not dislike the act either of parting lands or punishing offenders. Neither was here any

absolution of the woman from a sentence of death, but a dismission of her from thy sentence, which thou knewest not proper for thee to pronounce. Herein hadst thou respect to thy calling, and to the main purpose of thy coming into the world; which was neither to be an arbiter of civil causes nor a judge of criminal, but a Saviour of mankind; not to destroy the body, but to save the soul. And this was thy care in this miserable offender; *Go, and sin no more.* How much more doth it concern us to keep within the bounds of our vocation, and not to dare to trench upon the functions of others! How can we ever enough magnify thy mercy, who takest no pleasure in the death of a sinner? who so camest to save, that thou challengest us of unkindness for being miserable; *Why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

But, O Son of God, though thou wouldst not then be a judge, yet thou wilt once be. Thou wouldst not, in thy first coming, judge the sins of men; thou wilt come to judge them in thy second. The time shall come, when, upon that just and glorious tribunal, thou shalt judge every man according to his works. That we may not one day hear thee say, *Go, ye cursed,* let us now hear thee say, *Go, sin no more.*

THE THANKFUL PENITENT.—Luke vii.

One while I find Christ invited by a publican, now by a Pharisee. Wherever he went he made better cheer than he found, in an happy exchange of spiritual repast for bodily.

Who knows not the Pharisees to have been the proud enemies of Christ; men over-conceited of themselves, contemptuous of others; severe in show, hypocrites in deed; strict sectaries, insolent justiciaries? Yet here one of them invites Christ, and that in good earnest. The man was not like his fellows, captious, not ceremonious; had he been of their stamp, the omission of washing the feet had been mortal. No profession hath not yielded some good: Nicodemus and Gamaliel were of the same strain. Neither is it for nothing that the Evangelist, having branded this sect for despising the counsel of God against themselves, presently subjoins this history of Simon the Pharisee as an exempt man. O Saviour, thou canst find out good Pharisees, good publicans, yea a good thief upon the cross; and that thou mayest find, thou canst make them so.

At the best, yet he was a Pharisee whose table thou here refusedst not. So didst thou in wisdom and mercy attemper thyself as to *become all things to all men, that thou mightest win some.* Thy harbinger was rough, as in clothes, so in disposition; professedly harsh and austere; thyself wert mild and sociable. So it was fit for both. He was a preacher of penance, thou the author of comfort and salvation; he made way for grace, thou gavest it. Thou hast bidden us to follow thyself, not thy forerunner. That then, which politics and timeservers do for earthly advantages, we will do for spiritual; frame ourselves to all companies, not in evil but in good, yea in indifferent things. What wonder is it that thou, who camest down from heaven to frame thyself to our nature, shouldst, whilst thou wert on earth, frame thyself to the several dispositions of men? Catch not at this, O ye licentious hypocrites, men of all hours, that can eat with gluttons, drink with drunkards, sing with ribalds, scoff with profane scorners, and yet talk holily with the religious; as if ye had hence any colour of your changeable conformity to all fashions. Our Saviour never sinned for any man's sake, though for our sakes he was sociable, that he might keep us from sinning. Can ye so converse with lewd goodfellows, as that ye repress their sins, redress their exorbitances, win them to God? now ye walk in the steps of Him that stuck not to sit down in the Pharisee's house.

There sat the Saviour; and, *behold, a woman in the city, that was a sinner.* I marvel not that she is led in with a note of wonder; wonder both on her part and on Christ's. That any sinner, that a sensual sinner, obdured in a notorious trade of evil, should voluntarily, out of a true remorse for her lewdness, seek to a Saviour, it is worthy of an accent of admiration. The noise of the Gospel is common, but whére is the power of it? It hath store of hearers, but few converts. Yet were there no wonder in her, if it were not with reference to the power and mercy of Christ; his power that thus drew the sinner, his mercy that received her. O Saviour, I wonder at her, but I bless thee for her, by whose only grace she was both moved and accepted.

A sinner? Alas, who was not? who is not so? Not only *in many things we sin all;* but in all things we all let fall many sins. Had there been a woman not a sinner, it had been beyond wonder. One man there was that was not a sinner, even he that was more than man, that God and Man who was the refuge of this sinner; but never woman that sinned not.

Yet he said not, "a woman that had sinned," but *that was a sinner*. An action doth not give denomination, but a trade. Even the wise charity of Christians, much more the mercy of God, can distinguish between sins of infirmity and practice of sin; and esteem us, not by a transient act, but by a permanent condition.

The woman was noted for a luxurious and incontinent life. What a deal of variety there is of sins! That which faileth cannot be numbered. Every sin continued deserves to brand the soul with this style. Here one is picked out from the rest; she is not noted for murder, for theft, for idolatry; only her lust makes her *a woman that was a sinner*. Other vices use not to give the owner this title, although they should be more heinous than it. Wantons may flatter themselves in the indifferency or slightness of this offence, their souls shall need no other conveyance to hell than this; which cannot be so pleasing to nature as it is hateful to God, who so speaks of it as if there were no sins but it; *A woman that was a sinner*.

She was a sinner, now she is not; her very presence argues her change. Had she been still in her old trade, she would no more have endured the sight of Christ than that devil did which cried out, *Art thou come to torment me?* Her eyes had been lamps and fires of lust, not fountains of tears; her hairs had been nets to catch foolish lovers, not a towel for her Saviour's feet: yet still she carries the name of what she was, a scar still remains after the wound healed. Simon will be ever the leper, and Matthew, the publican. How carefully should we avoid those actions which may ever stain us!

What a difference there is betwixt the carriage and proceedings of God and men! The mercy of God, as it *calleth those things that are not as if they were*, so it calleth those things that were as if they were not; *I will remember your iniquities no more*: as some skilful chirurgeon so sets the bone, or heals the sore, that it cannot be seen where the complaint was. Man's word is, That which is done cannot be undone; but the omnipotent goodness of God doth, as it were, undo our once committed sins: *Take away my iniquity, and thou shalt find none*. What we were in ourselves, we are not to him; since he hath changed us from ourselves.

O God, why should we be niggardly where thou art liberal? why should we be reading those lines which thou hast not only crossed, but quite blotted, yea wiped out?

It is a good word, *She was a sinner.* To be wicked is odious to God, angels, saints, men; to have been so is blessed and glorious. I rejoice to look back and see my Egyptians lying dead upon the shore; that I may praise the Author of my deliverance and victory: else it matters not what they were, what I was. O God, thou, whose title is, *I AM*, regardest the present. He befriends and honours us that says, *Such ye were, but ye are washed.*

The place adds to the heinousness of the sin; *in the city.* The more public the fact is, the greater is the scandal. Sin is sin, though in a desert. Others' eyes do not make the act more vile in itself; but the offence is multiplied by the number of beholders.

I hear no name of either the city or the woman; she was too well known in her time. How much better is it to be obscure than infamous! Herein, I doubt not, God meant to spare the reputation of a penitent convert. He who hates not the person but the sin, cares only to mention the sin, not the person. It is justice to prosecute the vice, it is mercy to spare the offender. How injurious a presumption is it for any man to name her whom God would have concealed! and to cast this aspersion on those whom God hath noted for holiness!

The worst of this woman is past, *She was a sinner;* the best is to come, *She sought out Jesus:* where? In the house of a Pharisee. It was the most inconvenient place in the world for a noted sinner to seek Christ in.

No men stood so much upon the terms of their own righteousness, no men so scornfully disdained an infamous person. The touch of an ordinary, though honest Jew, was their pollution; how much more the presence of a strumpet! What a sight was a known sinner to him, to whom his holiest neighbour was a sinner! How doth he, though a better Pharisee, look awry, to see such a piece in his house, while he dares think, *If this man were a prophet, he would surely know what manner of woman that is!* Neither could she fore-imagine less, when she ventured to press over the threshold of a Pharisee. Yet not the known austerity of the man, and her miswelcome to the place, could affright her from seeking her Saviour even there. No disadvantage can defer the penitent soul from a speedy recourse to Christ. She says not, "If Jesus were in the street, or in the field, or in the house of some humble publican, or anywhere save with a Pharisee, I would

come to him; now I will rather defer my access than seek him where I shall find scorn and censure:" but, as not fearing the frowns of that overly host, she thrusts herself into Simon's house to find Jesus. It is not for the distressed to be bashful, it is not for a believer to be timorous. O Saviour, if thy Spouse miss thee, she will seek thee through the streets: the blows of the watch shall not daunt her. If thou be on the other side of the water, a Peter will leap into the sea and swim to thee: if on the other side of the fire, thy blessed martyrs will run through those flames to thee. We are not worthy of the comfort of thy presence, if, wheresoever we know thou art, whether in person or in exile or at the stake, we do not hasten thither to enjoy thee.

The place was not more unfit than the time. A Pharisee's house was not more unproper for a sinner than a feast was for humiliation. Tears at a banquet are as jigs at a funeral. There is a season for all things. Music had been more apt for a feast than mourning.

The heart that hath once felt the sting of sin and the sweetness of remission, hath no power to delay the expressions of what it feels, and cannot be confined to terms of circumstance.

Whence then was this zeal of her access? Doubtless, she had heard from the mouth of Christ, in those heavenly sermons of his, many gracious invitations of all troubled and labouring souls; she had observed how he vouchsafed to come under the roofs of despised publicans, of professed enemies; she had noted all the passages of his power and mercy: and now deep remorse wrought upon her heart for her former viciousness. The pool of her conscience was troubled by the descending angel, and now she steps in for a cure. The arrow stuck fast in her soul, which she could not shake out; and now she comes to this sovereign dittany to expel it. Had not the Spirit of God wrought upon her ere she came, and wrought her to come, she had never either sought or found Christ. Now she comes in and finds that Saviour whom she sought.

She comes in, but not empty handed. Though debauched, she was a Jewess. She could not but have heard that she ought *not* to *appear before the Lord empty*. What then brings she? It was not possible she could bring to Christ a better present than her own penitent soul; yet to testify that, she brings another, delicate both for the vessel and the contents, *a box of alabaster;* a solid, hard, pure, clear marble, fit for the receipt of so precious

an ointment: the ointment pleasant and costly; a composition of many fragrant odours, not for medicine but delight.

The soul that is truly touched with the sense of its own sin can think nothing too good, too dear for Christ. The remorsed sinner begins first with the tender of *burnt offerings, and calves of a year old:* thence he ascends to hecatombs, *thousands of rams;* and above that yet, to *ten thousand rivers of oil;* and yet higher, could be content to *give the first-fruit of his body* to expiate *the sin of his soul.* Anything, everything, is too small a price for peace. O Saviour, since we have tasted how sweet thou art, lo, we bring thee the daintiest and costliest perfumes of our humble obediences; yea, if so much of our blood as this woman brought ointment may be useful or pleasing to thy Name, we do most cheerfully consecrate it unto thee. If we would not have thee think heaven too good for us, why should we stick at any earthly retribution to thee, in lieu of thy great mercies?

Yet here I see more than the price. This odoriferous perfume was that wherewith she had wont to make herself pleasing to her wanton lovers; and now she comes purposely to offer it up to her Saviour.

As her love was turned another way, from sensual to divine, so shall her ointment also be altered in the use. That which was abused to luxury shall now be consecrated to devotion. There is no other effect in whatsoever true conversion; *As we have given our members servants to iniquity* to commit *iniquity, so shall we now give our members servants unto righteousness in holiness.* If the dames of Israel, that thought nothing more worth looking on than their own faces, have spent too much time in their glasses, now they shall cast in those metals to make a laver for the washing off their uncleannesses. If I have spent the prime of my strength, the strength of my wit, upon myself and vanity, I have bestowed my alabaster-box amiss; O now teach me, my God and Saviour, to improve all my time, all my abilities, to thy glory. This is all the poor recompense can be made thee, for those shameful dishonours thou hast received from me.

The woman is come in, and now she doth not boldly face Christ, but, as unworthy of his presence, *she stands behind.* How could she in that site wash his feet with her tears? was it that our Saviour did not sit at the feast after our fashion, but, according to the then Jewish and Roman fashion, lie on the one side? or was it that this phrase doth not so much import posture as pre-

sence? Doubtless it was bashfulness and shame, arising from the conscience of her own former wickedness, that placed her thus. How well is the case altered! She had wont to look boldly in the face of her lovers, now she dares not behold the awful countenance of her Saviour: she had wont to send her alluring beams forth into the eyes of her wanton paramours, now she casts her dejected eyes to the earth, and dares not so much as raise them up to see those eyes from which she desired commiseration. It was a true inference of the prophet, *Thou hast a whore's forehead, thou canst not blush:* there cannot be a greater sign of whorishness than impudence. This woman can now blush; she hath put off the harlot, and is turned true penitent. Bashfulness is both a sign and effect of grace. O God, could we but bethink how wretched we are in nature, how vile through our sins, how glorious, holy, and powerful a God thou art, before whom the brightest angels hide their faces, we could not come but with a trembling awfulness into thy presence.

Together with shame here is sorrow; a sorrow testified by tears, and tears in such abundance, that she washes the feet of our Saviour with those streams of penitence; *she began to wash his feet with tears.* We hear when she began; we hear not when she ended. When the grapes are pressed, the juice runs forth; so when the mind is pressed, tears distil, the true juice of penitence and sorrow. These eyes were not used to such clouds or to such showers; there was nothing in them formerly but sunshine of pleasure, beams of lust; now they are resolved into the drops of grief and contrition. Whence was this change but from the secret working of God's Spirit? *He caused his wind to blow, and the waters flowed; he smote the rock, and the waters gushed out.* O God, smite thou this rocky heart of mine, and the waters of repentance shall burst forth in abundance.

Never were thy feet, O Saviour, bedewed with more precious liquor than this of remorseful tears. These cannot be so spent but that thou keepest them in thy bottle; yea, thou returnest them back with interest of true comfort: *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Blessed are they that mourn.* Lo, this wet seedtime shall be followed with an harvest of happiness and glory.

That this service might be complete, as her eyes were the ewer, so her hair was the towel for the feet of Christ. Doubtless, at a feast there was no want of the most curious linen for this purpose. All this was nothing to her; to approve her sincere humi-

lity and hearty devotion to Christ, her hair shall be put to this glorious office. The hair is the chief ornament of womanhood; the feet, as they are the lowest part of the body, so the meanest for account, and homeliest for employment: and lo, this penitent bestows the chief ornament of her head on the meanest office to the feet of her Saviour. That hair, which she was wont to spread as a net to catch her amorous companions, is honoured with the employment of wiping the beautiful feet of Him that brought the glad tidings of peace and salvation; and, might it have been any service to him to have licked the dust under those feet of his, how gladly would she have done it! Nothing can be mean that is done to the honour of a Saviour.

Never was any hair so preferred as this. How I envy those locks that were graced with the touch of those sacred feet, but much more those lips that kissed them! Those lips, that had been formerly inured to the wanton touches of her lascivious lovers, now sanctify themselves with the testimony of her humble homage and dear respects to the Son of God.

Thus her ointment, hands, eyes, hair, lips are now consecrated to the service of Christ her Saviour, whom she had offended. If our satisfaction be not in some kind proportionable to our offence, we are no true penitents.

All this while I hear not one word fall from the mouth of this woman. What need her tongue speak when her eyes spake, her hands spake, her gesture, her countenance, her whole carriage was vocal? I like this silent speaking well; when our actions talk, and our tongues hold their peace. The common practice is contrary. Men's tongues are busy, but their hands are still. All their religion lies in their tongue; their hands either do nothing, or ill: so as their profession is but wind, as their words. Wherefore are words but for expression of the mind? If that could be known by the eye or by the hand, the language of both were alike. There are no words amongst spirits; yet they perfectly understand each other: *The heavens declare the glory of God.* All tongues cannot speak so loud as they that have none. Give me the Christian that is seen, and not heard. The noise that our tongue makes in a formality of profession, shall, in the silence of our hands, condemn us for hypocrites.

The Pharisee saw all this, but with an evil eye. Had he not had some grace, he had never invited such a guest as Jesus; and if he had had grace enough, he had never entertained such a

thought as this of the guest he invited; *If this man were a prophet, he would have known what manner of woman it is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.*

How many errors in one breath! Justly, O Simon, hath this one thought lost thee the thank of thy feast.

Belike, at the highest, thou judgedst thy guest but a prophet; and now, thou doubtest whether he were so much. Besides this undervaluation, how unjust is the ground of this doubt! Every prophet knew not every thing; yea, no prophet ever knew all things. Elisha knew the very secrets of the Assyrian privy-chamber; yet he knew not the calamity of his worthy hostess. The finite knowledge of the ablest seer reaches but so far as it will please God to extend it. Well might he therefore have been a prophet, and in the knowledge of greater matters not have known this.

Unto this, how weakly didst thou, because of Christ's silent admission of the woman, suppose him ignorant of her quality! as if knowledge should be measured always by the noise of expression. Stay but a while, and thou shalt find that he well knew both her life and thy heart.

Besides, how injuriously dost thou take this woman for what she was! not conceiving, as well thou mightest, "Were not this woman a convert, she would never have offered herself into this presence." Her modesty and her tears bewray her change; and if she be changed, why is she censured for what she is not?

Lastly, how strong did it savour of the leaven of thy profession; that thou supposedst, were she what she was, that it could not stand with the knowledge and holiness of a prophet to admit of her least touch, yea of her presence! Whereas, on the one side, outward conversation in itself makes no man unclean or holy, but according to the disposition of the patient; on the other, such was the purity and perfection of this thy glorious guest, that it was not possibly infectible, nor any way obnoxious to the danger of others' sin. He that said once, *Who touched me?* in regard of virtue issuing from him, never said, "Whom have I touched?" in regard of any contagion incident to him. We, sinful creatures, in whom the prince of this world finds too much, may easily be tainted with other mens' sins: he, who came to take away the sins of the world, was uncapable of pollution by sin. Had the woman then been still a sinner, thy censure of Christ was proud and unjust.

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The Pharisee spake; but it was within himself: and now, behold, *Jesus answering said.*

What we think, we speak to our hearts, and we speak to God; and he equally hears, as if it came out of our mouths. Thoughts are not free. Could men know and convince them, they would be no less liable to censure, than if they came forth clothed with words. God, who hears them, judges of them accordingly. So here, the heart of Simon speaks, *Jesus answers.*

Jesus answers him; but with a parable. He answers many a thought with judgment; the blasphemy of the heart, the murder of the heart, the adultery of the heart are answered by him with real vengeance. For Simon, our Saviour saw his error was either out of simple ignorance or weak mistaking: where he saw no malice, then it is enough to answer with a gentle conviction.

The convictive answer of Christ is by way of parable. The wisdom of God knows how to circumvent us for our gain; and can speak that pleasingly by a prudent circumlocution which right-down would not be digested. Had our Saviour said in plain terms, "Simon, whether dost thou or this sinner love me more?" the Pharisee could not, for shame, but have stood upon his reputation; and in a scorn of the comparison, have protested his exceeding respects to Christ. Now, ere he is aware, he is fetched in to give sentence against himself, for her whom he condemned. O Saviour, thou hast made us fishers of men: how should we learn of thee so to bait our hooks, that they may be most likely to take! Thou, the great Householder of thy Church, hast provided victuals for thy family; thou hast appointed us to dress them: if we do not so cook them as that they may fit the palates to which they are intended, we do both lose our labour and thy cost.

The parable is of two debtors to one creditor: the one owed a lesser sum: the other a greater: both are forgiven. It was not the purpose of him that propounded it that we should stick in the bark. God is our creditor, our sins our debts. We are all debtors, but one more deep than another. No man can pay this debt alone, satisfaction is not possible, only remission can discharge us. God doth in mercy forgive as well the greatest as the least sins. Our love to God is proportionable to the sense of our remission. So then the Pharisee cannot choose but confess, that the more and greater the sin is, the greater mercy in the forgiveness; and the more mercy in the forgiver, the greater obligation and more love in the forgiven.

Truth, from whose mouth soever it falls, is worth taking up. Our Saviour praises the true judgment of a Pharisee. It is an injurious indiscretion in those who are so prejudiced against the persons, that they reject the truth. He that would not quench the smoking flax encourages even the least good. As the careful chirurgeon strokes the arm ere he strikes the vein, so did Christ here ere he convinces the Pharisee of his want of love, he graceth him with a fair approbation of his judgment; yet the while turning both his face and his speech to the poor penitent, as one that cared more for a true humiliation for sin than for a false pretence of respect and innocence.

With what a dejected and abashed countenance, with what earthfixed eyes do we imagine the poor woman stood, when she saw her Saviour direct his face and words to her! She, that durst but stand behind him, and steal the falling of some tears upon his feet, with what a blushing astonishment doth she behold his sidereal countenance cast upon her!

While his eye was turned towards this penitent, his speech was turned to the Pharisee concerning that penitent, by him mistaken: *Seest thou this woman?* He who before had said, *If this man were a prophet, he would have known what manner of woman this is,* now hears, *Seest thou this woman?* Simon saw but her outside: Jesus lets him see that he saw her heart, and will thus convince the Pharisee that he is more than a prophet, who knew not her conversation only, but her soul.

The Pharisee, that went all by appearance, shall by her deportment see the proof of her good disposition: it shall happily shame him to hear the comparison of the wants of his own entertainments with the abundance of hers. It is strange that any of this formal sect should be defective in their lotions. Simon had not given water to so great a guest, she washes his feet with her tears. By how much the water of the eye was more precious than the water of the earth, so much was the respect and courtesy of this penitent above the neglected office of the Pharisee. What use was there of a towel where was no water? She that made a fountain of her eyes, made precious napery of her hair: that better flax shamed the linen in the Pharisee's chest. A kiss of the cheek had wont to be pledge of the welcome of their guests. Simon neglects to make himself thus happy: she redoubles the kisses of her humble thankfulness upon the blessed feet of her Saviour. The Pharisee omits ordinary oil for the head; she sup-

plies the most precious and fragrant oil to his feet. Now the Pharisee reads his own taxation in her praise, and begins to envy where he had scorned.

It is our fault, O Saviour, if we mistake thee. We are ready to think, so thou have the substance of good usage, thou regardest not the compliments and ceremonies; whereas now we see thee to have both meat and welcome in the Pharisee's house, and yet hear thee glance at his neglect of washing, kissing, anointing. Doubtless, omission of due circumstances in thy entertainment may deserve to lose our thanks. Do we pray to thee? do we hear thee preach to us? now we make thee good cheer in our house; but if we perform not these things with a fit decency of our outward carriages, we give thee not thy water, thy kisses, thy oil. Even meet ritual observances are requisite for thy full welcome.

Yet how little had these things been regarded, if they had not argued the woman's thankful love to thee, and the ground of that love, sense of her remission, and the Pharisee's default in both.

Love and action do necessarily evince each other. True love cannot lurk long unexpressed; it will be looking out at the eyes, creeping out of the mouth, breaking out at the fingers' ends, in some actions of dearness; especially those wherein there is pain and difficulty to the agent, profit or pleasure to the affected. O Lord, in vain shall we profess to love thee if we do nothing for thee. Since our goodness cannot reach up unto thee, who art our glorious Head; O let us bestow upon thy feet (thy poor members here below) our tears, our hands, our ointment, and whatever our gifts or endeavours may testify our thankfulness and love to thee in them.

O happy word! *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her.* Methinks I see how this poor penitent revived with this breath; how new life comes into her eyes, new blood into her cheeks, new spirits into her countenance: like unto our mother earth, when in that first confusion *God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that beareth seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit;* all runs out into flowers, and blossoms, and leaves, and fruit. Her former tears said, *Who shall deliver me from this body of death?* Now her cheerful smiles say, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

Seldom ever do we meet with so perfect a penitent; seldom do we find so gracious a dismission. What can be wished of any mortal creature, but remission, safety, faith, peace? All these are

here met, to make a contrite soul happy: remission, the ground of her safety; faith, the ground of her peace; safety and salvation, the issue of her remission; peace, the blessed fruit of her faith.

O woman, the perfume that thou broughtest is poor and base in comparison of those sweet savours of rest and happiness that are returned to thee: well was that ointment bestowed wherewith thy soul is sweetened to all eternity.

MARTHA AND MARY.—Luke x.

We may read long enough ere we find Christ in an house of his own: *the foxes have holes, and the birds have nests;* he that had all possessed nothing. One while I see him in a publican's house, then in a Pharisee's, now I find him at Martha's.

His last entertainment was with some neglect; this with too much solicitude.

Our Saviour was now in his way. The sun might as soon stand still as he. The more we move the liker we are to heaven, and to this God that made it.

His progress was to Jerusalem, for some holy feast. He whose devotion neglected not any of those sacred solemnities will not neglect the due opportunities of his bodily refreshing: as not thinking it meet to travel and preach harbourless, he diverts where he knew his welcome, to the village of Bethany. There dwelt the two devout sisters, with their brother, his friend Lazarus. Their roof receives him. O happy house, into which the Son of God vouchsafed to set his foot! O blessed women, that had the grace to be the hostesses to the God of heaven! How should I envy your felicity herein, if I did not see the same favour, if I be not wanting to myself, lying open to me!

I have two ways to entertain my Saviour; in his members, and in himself: in his members, by charity and hospitableness, *what I do to one of those his little ones, I do to him;* in himself, by faith, *if any man open he will come in and sup with him.* O Saviour, thou standest at the door of our hearts, and knockest by the solicitations of thy messengers, by the sense of thy chastisements, by the motions of thy Spirit: if we open to thee by a willing admission and faithful welcome, thou wilt be sure to take up our souls with thy gracious presence, and not to sit with us for a

momentary meal, but to dwell with us for ever. Lo, thou didst but call in at Bethany, but here shall be thy rest for everlasting.

Martha, it seems, as being the elder sister, bore the name of the housekeeper; Mary was her assistant in the charge. A blessed pair; sisters not more in nature than grace, in spirit no less than in flesh. How happy a thing is it when all the parties in a family are jointly agreed to entertain Christ!

No sooner is Jesus entered into the house than he falls to preaching: that no time may be lost, he stays not so much as till his meat be made ready, but while his bodily repast was in hand provides spiritual food for his hosts. It was his *meat and drink to do the will of his Father.* He fed more upon his own diet than he could possibly upon theirs: his best cheer was to see them spiritually fed. How should we, whom he hath called to this sacred function, *be instant in season and out of season!* We are, by his sacred ordination, the lights of the world. No sooner is the candle lighted, than it gives that light which it hath, and never intermits till it be wasted to the snuff.

Both the sisters for a time sat attentively listening to the words of Christ. Household occasions call Martha away; Mary sits still at his feet, and hears. Whether shall we more praise, her humility or her docility? I do not see her take a stool and sit by him, or a chair and sit above him; but, as desiring to show her heart was as low as her knees, she sits at his feet. She was lowly set, richly warmed with those heavenly beams. The greater submission, the more grace. If there be one hollow in the valley lower than another, thither the waters gather.

Martha's house is become a divinity-school: Jesus, as the doctor, sits in the chair; Martha, Mary, and the rest, sit as disciples at his feet. Standing implies a readiness of motion; sitting, a settled composedness to this holy attendance.

Had these two sisters provided our Saviour never such delicates, and waited on his trencher never so officiously, yet, had they not listened to his instruction, they had not bidden him welcome; neither had he so well liked his entertainment. This was the way to feast him; to feed their ears by his heavenly doctrine. His best cheer is our proficiency; our best cheer is his word. O Saviour, let my soul be thus feasted by thee; do thou thus feast thyself by feeding me. This mutual diet shall be thy praise and my happiness.

Though Martha was for the time an attentive hearer, yet now her care of Christ's entertainment carries her into the kitchen. Mary sits still. Neither was Mary more devout than Martha busy. Martha cares to feast Jesus; Mary to be feasted of him. There was more solicitude in Martha's active part; more piety in Mary's sedentary attendance: I know not in whether more zeal. Good Martha was desirous to express her joy and thankfulness for the presence of so blessed a guest by the actions of her careful and plenteous entertainment. I know not how to censure the holy woman for her excess of care to welcome her Saviour. Sure, she herself thought she did well; and out of that confidence fears not to complain to Christ of her sister.

I do not see her come to her sister, and whisper in her ear the great need of her aid; but she comes to Jesus, and, in a kind of unkind expostulation of her neglect, makes her moan to him; *Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?* Why did she not rather make her first address to her sister? Was it for that she knew Mary was so tied by the ears with those adamantine chains that came from the mouth of Christ, that until his silence and dismission she had no power to stir? or was it out of an honour and respect to Christ, that in his presence she would not presume to call off her sister without his leave?

Howsoever, I cannot excuse the holy woman from some weaknesses. It was a fault to measure her sister by herself; and, apprehending her own act to be good, to think her sister could not do well if she did not so too. Whereas goodness hath much latitude. Ill is opposed to good, not good to good. Neither in things lawful nor indifferent are others bound to our examples. Mary might hear, Martha might serve, and both do well. Mary did not censure Martha for her rising from the feet of Christ to prepare his meal; neither should Martha have censured Mary for sitting at Christ's feet to feed her soul. It was a fault, that she thought an excessive care of a liberal outward entertainment of Christ was to be preferred to a diligent attention to Christ's spiritual entertainment of them. It was a fault, that she durst presume to question our Saviour of some kind of unrespect to her toil, *Lord, dost thou not care?* What sayest thou, Martha? Dost thou challenge the Lord of heaven and earth of incogitancy and neglect? Dost thou take upon thee to prescribe unto that Infinite Wisdom, instead of receiving directions from him? It is well thou mettest

with a Saviour whose gracious mildness knows how to pardon and pity the errors of our zeal.

Yet I must needs say here wanted not fair pretences for the ground of this thy expostulation. Thou, the elder sister, workest; Mary, the younger, sits still. And what work was thine but the hospitable receipt of thy Saviour and his train? Had it been for thine own paunch, or for some carnal friends, it had been less excusable; now it was for Christ himself, to whom thou couldst never be too obsequious.

But all this cannot deliver thee from the just blame of this bold subincusation; *Lord, dost thou not care?* How ready is our weakness, upon every slight discontentment, to quarrel with our best friend, yea, with our good God; and the more we are put to it, to think ourselves the more neglected, and to challenge God for our neglect! Do we groan on the bed of our sickness; and, languishing in pain, complain of long hours and weary sides? straight we think, "Lord, dost thou not care that we suffer?" Doth God's poor Church go to wreck, while *the ploughers plough-ing on* her *back make long furrows?* "Lord, dost thou not care?" But know thou, O thou feeble and distrustful soul, the more thou doest, the more thou sufferest, the more thou art cared for: neither is God ever so tender over his Church as when it is most exercised. Every pang and stitch and gird is first felt of him that sends it. O God, thou knowest our works, and our labour, and our patience: we may be ignorant and diffident; thou canst not but be gracious.

It could not but trouble devout Mary to hear her sister's impatient complaint; a complaint of herself to Christ, with such vehemence of passion, as if there had been such strangeness betwixt the two sisters, that the one would do nothing for the other without an external compulsion from a superior. How can she choose but think, "If I have offended, why was I not secretly taxed for it in a sisterly familiarity? What if there have been some little omission? must the whole house ring of it before my Lord and all his disciples? Is this carriage beseeming a sister? Is my devotion worthy of a quarrel? Lord, dost thou not care that I am injuriously censured?" Yet I hear not a word of reply from that modest mouth. O holy Mary, I admire thy patient silence. Thy sister blames thee for thy piety; the disciples afterwards blame thee for thy bounty and cost: not a word falls from thee in a just vindication of thine honour and innocence;

but in an humble taciturnity thou leavest thine answer to thy Saviour. How should we learn of thee, when we are complained of for well-doing, to seal up our lips, and to expect our righting from above!

And how sure, how ready art thou, O Saviour, to speak in the cause of the dumb? *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen the better part.* What needed Mary to speak for herself when she had such an Advocate?

Doubtless, Martha was, as it were, divided from herself with the multiplicity of her careful thoughts: our Saviour therefore doubles her name in his compellation, that in such distraction he may both find and fix her heart.

The good woman made full account that Christ would have sent away her sister with a check, and herself with thanks; but now her hopes fail her; and though she be not directly reproved, yet she hears her sister more approved than she; *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.*

Our Saviour received courtesy from her in her diligent and costly entertainment; yet he would not blanch her error, and smooth her up in a weak misprison. No obligations may so enthral us as that our tongues should not be free to reprove faults where we find them. They are base and servile spirits that will have their tongue tied to their teeth.

This glance towards a reproof implies an opposition of the condition of the two sisters. Themselves were not more near in nature than their present humour and estate differed.

One is opposed to many; *necessary*, to superfluous; *solicitude*, to quietness: *Thou art careful and troubled about many things; one thing is necessary.* How far then may our care reach to these earthly things? On the one side, O Saviour, thou hast charged us to *take no thought what to eat, drink, put on;* on the other, thy chosen vessel hath told us, that *he that provides not for his family hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* We may, we must care for many things; so that our care be for good, and well: for good, both in kind and measure; well, so as our care be free from distraction, from distrust: from distraction, that it hinder us not from the necessary duties of our general calling; from distrust, that we misdoubt not God's providence while we employ our own. We cannot care for thee unless we thus care for ourselves, for ours.

Alas! how much care do I see everywhere, but how few Marthas! Her care was for her Saviour's entertainment; ours, for ourselves. One finds perplexities in his estate, which he desires to extricate; another beats his brains for the raising of his house; one busies his thoughts about the doubtful condition, as he thinks, of the times, and casts in his anxious head the imaginary events of all things, opposing his hopes to his fears; another studies how to avoid the cross blows of an adversary. *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.* Foolish men! why do we set our hearts upon the rack, and need not? why will we endure to bend under that burden which more able shoulders have offered to undertake for our ease? Thou hast bidden us, O God, to cast our cares upon thee, with promise to care for us. We do gladly unload ourselves upon thee. O let our care be to depend on thee, as thine is to provide for us!

Whether Martha be pitied or taxed for her sedulity, I am sure Mary is praised for her devotion. *One thing is necessary;* not by way of negation, as if nothing were necessary but this; but by way of comparison, as that nothing is so necessary as this. Earthly occasions must vail to spiritual. Of those three main grounds of all our actions, necessity, convenience, pleasure, each transcends other; convenience carries it away from pleasure, necessity from convenience, and one degree of necessity from another. The degrees are according to the conditions of the things necessary. The condition of these earthly necessaries is, that without them we cannot live temporally; the condition of the spiritual, that without them we cannot live eternally. So much difference then as there is betwixt temporary and eternal, so much there must needs be betwixt the necessity of these bodily actions and those spiritual: both are necessary in their kinds; neither must here be an opposition, but a subordination. The body and soul must be friends, not rivals: we may not so ply the Christian, that we neglect the man.

O the vanity of those men, who, neglecting that one thing necessary, affect many things superfluous! Nothing is needless with worldly minds but this one, which is only necessary, the care of their souls. How justly do they lose that they cared not for, while they over-care for that which is neither worthy nor possible to be kept!

Neither is Mary's business more allowed than herself: *She*

hath chosen the good part. It was not forced upon her, but taken up by her election. Martha might have sat still as well as she: she might have stirred about as well as Martha. Mary's will made this choice, not without the inclination of Him who both gave this will and commends it. That will was before renewed; no marvel if it chose the good: though this were not in a case of good and evil, but of good and better. We have still this holy freedom through the inoperation of him that hath freed us. Happy are we if we can improve this liberty to the best advantage of our souls.

The stability or perpetuity of good adds much to the praise of it. Martha's part was soon gone; the thank and use of a little outward hospitality cannot long last; but Mary's *shall not be taken away from her.* The act of her hearing was transient, the fruit permanent: she now hears that which shall stick by her for ever.

What couldst thou hear, O holy Mary, from those sacred lips, which we hear not still? That heavenly doctrine is never but the same; not more subject to change than the Author of it. It is not impossible that the exercise of the gospel should be taken from us, but the benefit and virtue of it is as inseparable from our souls as their being. In the hardest times that shall stick closest to us; and till death, in death, after death, shall make us happy.

THE BEGGAR THAT WAS BORN BLIND, CURED.

John ix.

The man was *born blind.* This cure requires not art but power; a power no less than infinite and divine. Nature presupposeth a matter, though formless; art looks for matter formed to our hands; God stands not upon either. Where there was not an eye to be healed, what could an oculist do? It is only a God that can create. Such are we, O God, to all spiritual things: we want not sight, but eyes; it must be thou only that canst make us capable of illumination.

The blind man *sat begging.* Those that have eyes and hands and feet of their own may be able to help themselves; those that want these helps must be beholden to the eyes, hands, feet of others. The impotent are cast upon our mercy; happy are we

if we can lend limbs and senses to the needy. Affected beggary is odious; that which is of God's making justly challengeth relief.

Where should this blind man sit begging but near the temple? At one gate sits a cripple, a blind man at another. Well might these miserable souls suppose that piety and charity dwelt close together; the two tables were both of one quarry. Then are we best disposed to mercy towards our brethren when we have either craved or acknowledged God's mercy towards ourselves. If we go thither to beg of God, how can we deny mites when we hope for talents?

Never did Jesus move one foot but to purpose. He passed by, but so as that his virtue stayed; so did he pass by that his eye was fixed. The blind man could not see him, he sees the blind man. His goodness prevents us, and yields better supplies to our wants. He saw compassionately; not shutting his eyes, not turning them aside, but bending them upon that dark and disconsolate object. That which was said of the sun is much more true of him that made it, *Nothing is hid from his light;* but of all other things, miseries, especially of his own, are most intentively eyed of him. Could we be miserable unseen, we had reason to be heartless. O Saviour, why should we not imitate thee in this merciful improvement of our senses? Woe be to those eyes that care only to gaze upon their own beauty, bravery, wealth; not abiding to glance upon the sores of Lazarus, the sorrows of Joseph, the dungeon of Jeremy, the blind beggar at the gate of the temple.

The disciples see the blind man too, but with different eyes; our Saviour for pity and cure, they for expostulation; *Master, who did sin? this man or his parents, that he is born blind?* I like well, that whatsoever doubt troubled them they straight vent it into the ear of their Master. O Saviour, while thou art in heaven, thy school is upon earth. Wherefore serve thy *priests' lips* but to *preserve knowledge?* What use is there of the tongue of the learned, but to speak a word in season? Thou teachest us still, and still we doubt and ask and learn.

In one short question I find two truths and two falsehoods; the truths implied, the falsehoods expressed. It is true, that commonly man's suffering is for sin; that we may justly, and do often suffer even for the sins of our parents: it is false, that there is no other reason of our suffering but sin; that a man could sin

actually before he was, or was before his being, or could beforehand suffer for his after sins. In all likelihood, that absurd conceit of the transmigration of souls possessed the very disciples. How easily, and how far may the best be miscarried with a common error! We are not thankful for our own illumination, if we do not look with charity and pity upon the gross misopinions of our brethren.

Our Saviour sees, and yet will wink at so foul a misprision of his disciples. I hear neither chiding nor conviction. He that could have enlightened their minds, as he did the world at once, will do it by due leisure; and only contents himself here with a mild solution; *Neither this man, nor his parents.* We learn nothing of thee, O Saviour, if not meekness. What a sweet temper should be in our carriage towards the weaknesses of others' judgment! how should we instruct them without bitterness; and, without violence of passion, expect the meet seasons of their better information! The tender mother or nurse doth not rate her little one for that he goes not well; but gives him her hand, that he may go better. It is the spirit of lenity that must restore and confirm the lapsed.

The answer is direct and punctual; neither the sin of the man nor of his parents bereaved him of his eyes: there was an higher cause of this privation, that glory that God meant to win unto himself by redressing it. The parents had sinned in themselves, the man had sinned in his first parents: it is not the guilt of either that is guilty of this blindness. All God's afflictive acts are not punishments; some are for the benefit of the creature, whether for probation or prevention or reformation; all are for the praise, whether of his Divine power or justice or mercy.

It was fit so great a work should be ushered in with a preface. A sudden and abrupt appearance would not have beseemed so glorious a demonstration of Omnipotence. The way is made, our Saviour addresses himself to the miracle; a miracle, not more in the thing done than in the form of doing it.

The matter used was clay. Could there be a meaner? could there be aught more unfit? O Saviour, how oft hadst thou cured blindnesses by thy word alone! how oft by thy touch! how easily couldst thou have done so here! was this to show thy liberty, or thy power? liberty, in that thou canst at pleasure use variety of means, not being tied to any; power, in that thou couldst make use of contraries? Hadst thou pulled out a box, and

applied some medicinal ointment to the eyes, something had been ascribed to thy skill, more to the natural power of thy receipt; now thou madest use of clay, which had been enough to stop up the eyes of the seeing, the virtue must be all in thee, none in the means. The utter disproportion of this help to the cure adds glory to the worker.

How clearly did thou hence evince to the world that thou, who of clay couldst make eyes, wert the same who of clay hadst made man; since there is no part of the body that hath so little analogy to clay as the eye! this clearness is contrary to that opacity. Had not the Jews been more blind than the man whom thou curedst, and more hard and stiff than the clay which thou mollifiedst, they had in this one work both seen and acknowledged thy Deity.

What could the clay have done without thy tempering? It was thy spittle that made the clay effectual, it was that sacred mouth of thine that made the spittle medicinal. The water of Siloe shall but wash off that clay which this inward moisture made powerful. The clay thus tempered must be applied by the hand that made it, else it avails nothing.

What must the blind man needs think when he felt the cold clay upon the holes of his eyes! or, since he could not conceive what an eye was, what must the beholders needs think to see that hollowness thus filled up? Is this the way to give either eyes or sight? why did not the earth see with this clay as well as the man? what is there to hinder the sight, if this make it? Yet with these contrarieties must the faith be exercised where God intends the blessing of a cure.

It was never meant that this clay should dwell upon those pits of the eyes; it is only put on to be washed off, and that not by every water; none shall do it but that of Siloam, which signifies *sent;* and if the man had not been sent to Siloam, he had been still blind. All things receive their virtue from divine institution. How else should a piece of wheaten bread nourish the soul? how should spring water wash off spiritual filthiness? how should the foolishness of preaching save souls? how should the absolution of God's minister be more effectual than the breath of an ordinary Christian? Thou, O God, hast set apart these ordinances; thy blessing is annexed to them; hence is the ground of all our use and their efficacy. Hadst thou so instituted, Jordan would as well have healed blindness as Siloam leprosy.

That the man might be capable of such a miracle, his faith is set on work. He must be led, with his eyes daubed, up to the pool of Siloam. He washes, and sees. Lord, what did this man think when his eyes were now first given him? What a new world did he find himself now come into! how did he wonder at heaven and earth, and the faces and shapes of all creatures, the goodly varieties of colours, the cheerfulness of the light, the lively beams of the sun, the vast expansion of the air, the pleasant transparence of the water, at the glorious piles of the temple, and the stately palaces of Jerusalem! Every thing did not more please than astonish him. Lo, thus shall we be affected, and more, when the scales of our mortality being done away, we shall see as we are seen; when we shall behold the blessedness of that other world, the glory of the saints and angels, the infinite Majesty of the Son of God, the incomprehensible brightness of the all-glorious Deity. O my soul, that thou couldst be taken up beforehand with the admiration of that which thou canst not as yet be capable of foreseeing!

It could not be but that many eyes had been witnesses of this man's want of eyes. He sat begging at one of the temple gates. Not only all the city but all the country must needs know him. Thrice a year did they come up to Jerusalem, neither could they come to the temple and not see him. His very blindness made him noted. Deformities and infirmities of body do more easily both draw and fix the eye than an ordinary symmetry of parts. Besides his blindness, his trade made him remarkable. The importunity of his begging drew the eyes of the passengers. But of all other, the place most notified him. Had he sat in some obscure village of Judea, or in some blind lane of Jerusalem, perhaps he had not been heeded of many; but now that he took up his seat in the heart, in the head of the chief city, whither all resorted from all parts, what Jew can there be that knows not the blind beggar at the temple gate?

Purposely did our Saviour make choice of such a subject for his miracle; a man so poor, so public. The glory of the work could not have reached so far if it had been done to the wealthiest citizen of Jerusalem.

Neither was it for nothing that the act and the man is doubted of and inquired into by the beholders; *Is not this he that sat begging? Some said, It is he; others said, It is like him.*

No truths have received so full proofs as those that have been questioned.

The want or the sudden presence of an eye, much more of both, must needs make a great change in the face. Those little balls of light which no doubt were more clear than nature could have made them, could not but give a new life to the countenance. I marvel not if the neighbours, which had wont to see this dark visage led by a guide, and guided by a staff, seeing him now walking confidently alone out of his own inward light, and looking them cheerfully in the face, doubted whether this were he. The miraculous cures of God work a sensible alteration in men, not more in their own apprehension than in the judgment of others.

Thus in the redress of the spiritual blindness the whole habit of the man is changed. Where, before, his face looked dull and earthly, now there is a sprightful cheerfulness in it, through the comfortable knowledge of God and heavenly things: whereas, before, his heart was set upon worldly things, now he uses them but enjoys them not; and that use is, because he must, not because he would: where, before, his fears and griefs were only for pains of body, or loss of estate or reputation, now they are only spent upon the displeasure of his God and the peril of his soul. So as now the neighbours can say, "Is this the man?" others, "It is like him, it is not he."

The late blind man hears, and now sees himself questioned; and soon resolves the doubt, *I am he.* He that now saw the light of the sun would not hide the light of truth from others. It is an unthankful silence to smother the works of God in an affected secrecy. To make God a loser by his bounty to us were a shameful injustice. We ourselves abide not those sponges that suck up good turns unknown. O God, we are not worthy of our spiritual eyesight if we do not publish thy mercies on the housetop, and praise thee in the great congregation.

Man is naturally inquisitive. We search studiously into the secret works of nature; we pry into the reasons of the witty inventions of art; but if there be any thing that transcends art and nature, the more high and abstruse it is, the more busy we are to seek into it. This thirst after hidden, yea forbidden knowledge, did once cost us dear: but where it is good and lawful to know, inquiry is commendable; as here in these Jews, *How were thine eyes opened?* The first improvement of human reason is inqui-

sition; the next is information and resolution: and if the meanest events pass us not without a question, how much less those that carry in them wonder and advantage!

He that was so ready to profess himself the subject of the cure is no niggard of proclaiming the Author of it: *A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and sent me to Siloam to wash, and now I see.* The blind man knew no more than he said, and he said what he apprehended, *A man.* He heard Jesus speak, he felt his hand; as yet he could look no farther: upon his next meeting he saw God in this man. In matter of knowledge, we must be content to creep ere we can go. As that other recovered blind man saw, first, men walk like trees, after, like men; so no marvel if this man saw, first, this God only as a man, after, this man as God also. Onwards he thinks him a wonderful man, a mighty prophet. In vain shall we either expect a sudden perfection in the understanding of Divine matters or censure those that want it.

How did this man know what Jesus did? He was then stone-blind: what distinction could he yet make of persons, of actions? True; but yet the blind man never wanted the assistance of others' eyes; their relation hath assured him of the manner of his cure. Besides the contribution of his other senses, his ear might perceive the spittle to fall, and hear the enjoined command; his feeling perceived the cold and moist clay upon his lids. All these conjoined gave sufficient warrant thus to believe, thus to report. Our ear is our best guide to a full apprehension of the works of Christ. The works of God the Father, his creation and government, are best known by the eye; the works of God the Son, his redemption and mediation, are best known by the ear. O Saviour, we cannot personally see what thou hast done here. What are the monuments of thine Apostles and Evangelists, but the relations of the blind man's guide, what and how thou hast wrought for us? On these we strongly rely: these we do no less confidently believe, than if our very eyes had been witnesses of what thou didst and sufferedst upon earth. There were no place for faith if the ear were not worthy of as much credit as the eye.

How could the neighbours do less than ask where he was that had done so strange a cure? I doubt yet with what mind; I fear, not out of favour. Had they been but indifferent, they could not but have been full of silent wonder, and inclined to believe in so omnipotent an agent. Now, as prejudiced to Christ, and partial

to the Pharisees, they bring the late blind man before those professed enemies unto Christ. It is the preposterous religion of the vulgar sort, to claw and adore those which have tyrannically usurped upon their souls; though with neglect, yea with contempt, of God, in his word, in his works. Even unjust authority will never want soothing up, in whatsoever courses, though with disgrace and opposition to the truth. Base minds, where they find possession, never look after right.

Our Saviour had picked out the Sabbath for his cure. It is hard to find out any time wherein charity is unseasonable. As mercy is an excellent grace, so the works of it are fittest for the best day. We are all born blind, the font is our Siloam; no day can come amiss: but yet God's day is the properest for our washing and recovery. This alone is quarrel enough to these scrupulous wranglers, that an act of mercy was done on that day wherein their envy was but seasonable.

I do not see the man beg any more, when he once had his eyes; no burgher in Jerusalem was richer than he: I hear him stoutly defending that gracious Author of his cure, against the cavils of the malicious Pharisees: I see him, as a resolute confessor, suffering excommunication for the name of Christ, and maintaining the innocence and honour of so blessed a Benefactor: I hear him read a divinity lecture to them that sat in Moses's chair, and convincing them of blindness who punished him for seeing.

How can I but envy thee, O happy man, who, of a patient, provest an advocate for thy Saviour; whose gain of bodily sight made way for thy spiritual eyes; who hast lost a synagogue and hast found heaven; who, being abandoned of sinners, art received of the Lord of glory!

THE STUBBORN DEVIL EJECTED.

Matthew xvii; Mark ix.

How different, how contrary are our conditions here upon earth! While our Saviour is transfigured on the mount, his disciples are perplexed in the valley. Three of his choice followers were with him above, ravished with the miraculous proofs of his Godhead; nine other were troubled with the business of a stubborn devil below.

Much people was met to attend Christ, and there they will stay till he come down from Tabor. Their zeal and devotion brought them thither; their patient perseverance held them there. We

are not worthy the name of his clients if we cannot painfully seek him, and submissly wait his leisure.

He that was now a while retired into the mount to confer with his Father, and to receive the attendance of Moses and Elias, returns into the valley to the multitude. He was singled out a while for prayer and contemplation: now he was joined with the multitude for their miraculous cure and heavenly instruction. We that are his spiritual agents must be either preparing in the mount or exercising in the valley; one while in the mount of meditation, in the valley of action another; alone to study, in the assembly to preach: here is much variety, but all is work.

Moses, when he came down from the hill, heard music in the valley: Christ, when he came down from the hill, heard discord. The scribes, it seems, were setting hard upon the disciples. They saw Christ absent; nine of his train left in the valley; those they fly upon. As the devil, so his imps, watch close for all advantages. No subtle enemy but will be sure to attempt that part where is likelihood of least defence, most weakness. When the Spouse misses Him whom her soul loveth, every watchman hath a buffet for her. O Saviour, if thou be never so little stepped aside, we are sure to be assaulted with powerful temptations.

They that durst say nothing to the Master, so soon as his back is turned fall foul upon his weakest disciples. Even at the first hatching, the serpent was thus crafty, to begin at the weaker vessel: experience and time hath not abated his wit. If he still work upon *silly women laden with divers lusts*, upon rude and ungrounded ignorants, it is no other than his old wont.

Our Saviour, upon the skirts of the hill, knew well what was done in the plain, and therefore hastes down to the rescue of his disciples. The clouds and vapours do not sooner scatter upon the sun's breaking forth, than these cavils vanish at the presence of Christ. Instead of opposition, they are straight upon their knees. Here are now no quarrels, but humble salutations; and, if Christ's question did not force theirs, the scribes had found no tongue.

Doubtless, there were many eager patients in this throng: none made so much noise as the father of the demoniac. Belike, upon his occasion it was that the scribes held contestation with the disciples. If they wrangled, he sues, and that from his knees. Whom will not need make both humble and eloquent? The case was woful, and accordingly expressed. A son is a dear name, but

this was his only son. Were his grief ordinary, yet the sorrow were the less; but he is a fearful spectacle of judgment, for he is lunatic. Were this lunacy yet merely from a natural distemper, it were more tolerable; but this is aggravated by the possession of a cruel spirit, that handles him in a most grievous manner. Yet were he but in the rank of other demoniacs, the discomfort were more easy; but lo, this spirit is worse than all other his fellows: others are usually dispossessed by the disciples, this is beyond their power; *I besought thy disciples to cast him out, but they could not: therefore, Lord, have thou mercy on my son.* The despair of all other helps sends us importunately to the God of power. Here was his refuge: the strong man had gotten possession; it was only the stronger than he that can eject him. O God, spiritual wickednesses have naturally seized upon our souls: all human helps are too weak; only thy mercy shall improve thy power to our deliverance.

What bowels could choose but yearn at the distress of this poor young man? Phrensy had taken his brain: that disease was but health in comparison of the tyrannical possession of that evil spirit wherewith it was seconded. Out of hell there could not be a greater misery: his senses are either bereft or else left to torment him; he is torn and racked, so as he foams and gnashes, he pines and languishes; he is cast sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water. How that malicious tyrant rejoices in the mischief done to the creature of God! Had earth had any thing more pernicious than fire and water, thither had he been thrown, though rather for torture than despatch. It was too much favour to die at once. O God, with how deadly enemies hast thou matched us! Abate thou their power, since their malice will not be abated.

How many think of this case with pity and horror, and, in the mean time, are insensible of their own fearfuller condition! It is but oftentimes that the devil would cast this young man into a temporary fire; he would cast the sinner into an eternal fire, whose everlasting burnings have no intermissions. No fire comes amiss to him; the fire of affliction, the fire of lust, the fire of hell. O God, make us apprehensive of the danger of our sin, and secure from the fearful issue of sin. All these very same effects follow his spiritual possession. How doth he tear and rack them whom he vexes and distracts with inordinate cares and sorrows! how do they foam and gnash whom he hath drawn

to an impatient repining at God's afflictive hand! how do they pine away who hourly decay and languish in grace! O the lamentable condition of sinful souls; so much more dangerous, by how much less felt!

But, all this while, what part hath the moon in this man's misery? how comes the name of that goodly planet in question? Certainly, these diseases of the brain follow much the course of this queen of moisture. That power which she hath in humours is drawn to the advantage of the malicious spirit, her predominancy is abused to his despite; whether it were for the better opportunity of his vexation, or whether for the drawing of envy and discredit upon so noble a creature. It is no news with that subtle enemy to fasten his effects upon those secondary causes which he usurps to his own purposes. Whatever be the means, he is the tormentor. Much wisdom needs to distinguish betwixt the evil spirit abusing the good creature, and the good creature abused by the evil spirit.

He that knew all things asks questions; *How long hath he been so?* Not to inform himself; that devil could have done nothing without the knowledge, without the leave of the God of spirits: but that, by the confession of the parent, he might lay forth the woful condition of the child; that the thank and glory of the cure might be so much greater, as the complaint was more grievous: *He answered, From a child.*

O God, how I adore the depth of thy wise and just and powerful dispensation! Thou that couldst say, *I have loved Jacob, and Esau have I hated, ere the children had done good or evil,* thoughtest also good, ere this child could be capable of good or evil, to yield him over to the power of that Evil One. What need I ask for any other reason, than that which is the rule of all justice, thy Will? Yet even these weak eyes can see the just grounds of thine actions. That child, though an Israelite, was conceived and born in that sin which both could and did give Satan an interest in him. Besides, the actual sins of the parents deserved this revenge upon that piece of themselves. Rather, O God, let me magnify this mercy, that we and ours escape this judgment, than question thy justice that some escape not. How just might it have been with thee, that we, who have given way to Satan in our sins, should have way and scope given to Satan over us in our punishments! It is thy praise that any of us are free; it is no quarrel that some suffer.

Do I wonder to see Satan's bodily possession of this young man from a child, when I see his spiritual possession of every son of Adam from a longer date; not from a child, but from the womb, yea, in it? Why should not Satan possess his own? We are all by nature the sons of wrath. It is time for us to renounce him in baptism, whose we are till we be regenerate. He hath right to us in our first birth: our new birth acquits us from him, and cuts off all his claim. How miserable are they that have nothing but nature! Better had it been to have been unborn than not to be born again.

And if this poor soul from an infant were thus miserably handled, having done none actual evil; how just cause have we to fear the like judgments, who, by many foul offences, have deserved to draw this executioner upon us! O my soul, thou hast not room enough for thankfulness to that Good God who hath not delivered thee up to that malignant spirit.

The distressed father sits not still, neglects not means; *I brought him to thy disciples.* Doubtless, the man came first to seek for Christ himself: finding him absent he makes suit to the disciples. To whom should we have recourse in all our spiritual complaints, but to the agents and messengers of God? The noise of the like cures had surely brought this man, with much confidence, to crave their succour; and now, how cold was he at the heart, when he found that his hopes were frustrate! *They could not cast him out.* No doubt, the disciples tried their best; they laid their wonted charge upon this dumb spirit; but all in vain. They that could come with joy and triumph to their Master, and say, *The devils are subject to us,* find now themselves matched with a stubborn and refractory spirit. Their way was hitherto smooth and fair; they met with no rub till now. And now, surely, the father of the demoniac was not more troubled at this event than themselves. How could they choose but fear, lest their Master had, with himself, withdrawn that spiritual power which they had formerly exercised? Needs must their heart fail them with their success.

The man complained not of their impotence. It were fondly injurious to accuse them for that which they could not do. Had the want been in their will, they had well deserved a querulous language; it was no fault to want power. Only, he complains of the stubbornness, and laments the invincibleness, of that evil spirit.

I should wrong you, O ye blessed followers of Christ, if I should

say that, as Israel, when Moses was gone up into the mount, lost their belief with their guide; so that ye, missing your Master, who was now ascended up to his Tabor, were to seek for your faith. Rather, the wisdom of God saw reason to check your over-assured forwardness; and both to pull down your hearts by a just humiliation in the sense of your own weakness, and to raise up your hearts to new acts of dependence upon that sovereign power from which your limited virtue was derived.

What was more familiar to the disciples than ejecting of devils? In this only it is denied them. Our good God sometimes finds it requisite to hold us short in those abilities whereof we make least doubt, that we may feel whence we had them. God will be no less glorified in what we cannot do than in what we can do. If his graces were always at our command, and ever alike, they would seem natural, and soon run into contempt: now we are justly held in an awful dependence upon that gracious hand, which so gives as not to cloy us, and so denies as not to discourage us.

Who could now but expect that our Saviour should have pitied and bemoaned the condition of this sad father and miserable son, and have let fall some words of comfort upon them? Instead whereof, I hear him chiding and complaining, *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?* complaining, not of that woful father and more woful son; it was not his fashion to add affliction to the distressed, to break such bruised reeds; but of those scribes, who, upon the failing of the success of this suit, had insulted upon the disability of the followers of Christ, and depraved his power: although perhaps this impatient father, seduced by their suggestion, might slip into some thoughts of distrust.

There could not be a greater crimination than *faithless and perverse;* faithless, in not believing; perverse, in being obstinately set in their unbelief. Doubtless these men were not free from other notorious crimes: all were drowned in their infidelity. Moral uncleannesses or violences may seem more heinous to men; none are so odious to God as these intellectual wickednesses.

What an happy change is here in one breath of Christ! *How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me.* The one is a word of anger, the other of favour. His just indignation doth not exceed or impeach his goodness. What a sweet mixture there is in the perfect simplicity of the Divine nature! *In the*

midst of judgment he remembers mercy, yea, he acts it. His sun shines in the midst of this storm. Whether he frown or whether he smile, it is all to one purpose, that he may win the incredulous and disobedient. Whither should the rigour of all our censures tend but to edification, and not to destruction? We are physicians, we are not executioners; we give purges to cure, and not poisons to kill. It is for the just Judge to say one day to reprobate souls, *Depart from me;* in the mean time, it is for us to invite all that are spiritually possessed to the participation of mercy, *Bring him hither to me.*

O Saviour, distance was no hinderance to thy work: why should ths demoniac be brought to thee? Was it, that this deliverance might be the better evicted, and that the beholders might see it was not for nothing that the disciples were opposed with so refractory a spirit? or was it, that the scribes might be witnesses of that strong hostility that was betwixt thee and that foul spirit, and be ashamed of their blasphemous slander? or was it, that the father of the demoniac might be quickened in that faith which now, through the suggestion of the scribes, began to droop; when he should hear and see Christ so cheerfully to undertake and perform that whereof they had bidden him despair?

The possessed is brought; the devil is rebuked and ejected. That stiff spirit, which stood out boldly against the commands of the disciples, cannot but stoop to the voice of the Master. That power, which did at first cast him out of heaven, easily dispossesses him of an house of clay: *The Lord rebuke thee, Satan;* and then thou canst not but flee.

The disciples, who were not used to these affronts, cannot but be troubled at their missuccess: *Master, why could not we cast him out?* Had they been conscious of any defect in themselves, they had never asked the question. Little did they think to hear of their unbelief. Had they not had great faith, they could not have cast out any devils; had they not had some want of faith, they had cast out this. It is possible for us to be defective in some graces, and not to feel it.

Although, not so much their weakness is guilty of this unprevailing, as the strength of that evil spirit; *This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting.* Weaker spirits were wont to be ejected by a command; this devil was more sturdy and boisterous. As there are degrees of statures in men, so there are degrees of strength and rebellion in spiritual wickednesses. Here bidding

will not serve; they must pray; and praying will not serve without fasting. They must pray to God, that they may prevail; they must fast, to make their prayer more fervent, more effectual. We cannot now command; we can fast and pray. How good is our God to us, that while he hath not thought fit to continue to us those means which are less powerful for the dispossessing of the powers of darkness, yet hath he given us the greater! While we can fast and pray, God will command for us; Satan cannot prevail against us.

THE WIDOW'S MITES.—Mark xii.

The sacred wealth of the temple was either in stuff or in coin. For the one, the Jews had an house; for the other, a chest. At the concourse of all the males to the temple thrice a year, upon occasion of the solemn feasts, the oblations of both kinds were liberal. Our Saviour, as taking pleasure in the prospect, sets himself to view those offerings, whether for holy uses or charitable. Those things we delight in, we love to behold. The eye and the heart will go together.

And can we think, O Saviour, that thy glory hath diminished aught of thy gracious respects to our beneficence? or that thine acceptance of our charity was confined to the earth? Even now that thou sittest at the right hand of thy Father's glory, thou seest every hand that is stretched out to the relief of thy poor saints here below. And if vanity have power to stir up our liberality, out of a conceit to be seen of men, how shall faith encourage our bounty, in knowing that we are seen of thee, and accepted by thee! Alas, what are we the better for the notice of those perishing and impotent eyes, which can only view the outside of our actions; or for that waste wind of applause, which vanisheth in the lips of the speaker? Thine eye, O Lord, is piercing and retributive. As to see thee is perfect happiness, so to be seen of thee is true contentment and glory.

And dost thou, O God, see what we give thee, and not see what we take away from thee? are our offerings more noted than our sacrileges? Surely thy mercy is not more quicksighted than thy justice.

In both kinds our actions are viewed, our account is kept; and we are sure to receive rewards for what we have given, and vengeance for what we have defalked.

With thine eye of knowledge thou seest all we do; but what we do well thou seest with thine eye of approbation. So didst thou now behold these pious and charitable oblations. How well wert thou pleased with this variety! Thou sawest many rich men give much; and one poor widow gave more than they in lesser room.

The Jews were now under the Roman pressure. They were all tributaries, yet many of them rich; and those rich men were liberal to the common chest. Hadst thou seen those many rich give little, we had heard of thy censure; thou expectest a proportion betwixt the giver and the gift, betwixt the gift and the receipt; where that fails, the blame is just.

That nation, though otherwise faulty enough, was in this commendable. How bounteously open were their hands to the house of God! Time was when their liberality was fain to be restrained by proclamation; and now it needed no incitement: the rich gave much, the poorest gave more.

He saw a poor widow casting in two mites. It was misery enough that she was a widow. The married woman is under the careful provision of an husband; if she spends, he earns; in that estate four hands work for her; in her viduity, but two. Poverty added to the sorrow of her widowhood. The loss of some husbands is supplied by a rich jointure. It is some allay to the grief that the hand is left full, though the bed be empty. This woman was not more desolate than needy. Yet this poor widow gives. And what gives she? An offering like herself. *Two mites;* or, in our language, two half-farthing tokens. "Alas, good woman, who was poorer than thyself? Wherefore was that corban but for the relief of such as thou? Who should receive, if such give? Thy mites were something to thee, nothing to the treasury. How ill is that gift bestowed which disfurnisheth thee, and adds nothing to the common stock!" Some thrifty neighbour might perhaps have suggested this probable discouragement. Jesus publishes and applauds her bounty: *He called his disciples, and said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, This woman hath cast in more than they all.* While the rich put in their offering, I see no disciples called; it was enough that Christ noted their gifts alone: but when the widow comes with her two mites, now the domestics of Christ are summoned to assemble, and taught to admire this munificence; a solemn preface makes way to her praise, and her mites are made more precious than

the others' talents: *She gave more than they all.* More; not only in respect of the mind of the giver, but of the proportion of the gift, as hers. A mite to her was more than pounds to them: pounds were little to them, two mites were all to her: they gave out of their abundance, she out of her necessity. That which they gave left the heap less, yet an heap still; she gives all at once, and leaves herself nothing. So as she gave, not more than any, but *more than they all.* God doth not so much regard what is taken out as what is left.

O Father of mercies, thou lookest at once into the bottom of her heart and the bottom of her purse, and esteemest her gift according to both. As thou seest not as man, so thou valuest not as man: man judgeth by the worth of the gift; thou judgest by the mind of the giver and the proportion of the remainder. It were wide with us if thou shouldest go by quantities. Alas, what have we but mites, and those of thine own lending? It is the comfort of our meanness, that our affections are valued and not our presents: neither hast thou said, *God loves a* liberal *giver*, but a *cheerful.* If I had more, O God, thou shouldst have it; had I less, thou wouldst not despise it, who *acceptest the gift according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* Yea, Lord, what have I but two mites, a soul and a body? mere mites, yea, not so much, to thine infiniteness. O that I could perfectly offer them up unto thee according to thine own right in them, and not according to mine. How graciously wouldst thou be sure to accept them! how happy shall I be in thine acceptation!

THE AMBITION OF THE TWO SONS OF ZEBEDEE.

Matthew xx.

He who had his own time and ours in his hand, foreknew and foretold the approach of his dissolution.

When men are near their end, and ready to make their will, then is it seasonable to sue for legacies. Thus did the mother of the two Zebedees: therein well approving both her wisdom and her faith; wisdom, in the fit choice of her opportunity; faith, in taking such an opportunity.

The suit is half obtained that is seasonably made. To have made this motion at the entry into their attendance had been ab-

surd, and had justly seemed to challenge a denial. It was at the parting of the angel that Jacob would be blessed. The double spirit of Elijah is not sued for till his ascending.

But O the admirable faith of this good woman! When she heard the discourse of Christ's sufferings and death, she talks of his glory; when she hears of his cross, she speaks of his crown. If she had seen Herod come and tender his sceptre unto Christ, or the elders of the Jews come upon their knees with a submissive proffer of their allegiance, she might have had some reason to entertain the thoughts of a kingdom; but now, while the sound of betraying, suffering, dying, was in her ear, to make account of and suit for a room in his kingdom, it argues a belief able to triumph over all discouragements.

It was nothing for the disciples, when they saw him after his conquest of death and rising from the grave, to ask him, *Master, wilt thou now restore the kingdom unto Israel?* but for a silly woman to look through his future death and passion at his resurrection and glory, it is no less worthy of wonder than praise. To hear a man, in his best health and vigour, to talk of his confidence in God and assurance of Divine favour, cannot be much worth; but if in extremities we can believe above hope, against hope, our faith is so much more noble as our difficulties are greater. Never sweeter perfume arose from any altar than that which ascended from Job's dunghill, *I know that my Redeemer liveth.*

What a strange style is this that is given to this woman! It had been as easy to have said, the wife of Zebedee, or the sister of Mary or of Joseph, or, as her name was, plain Salome; but now, by an unusual description, she is styled *The mother of Zebedee's children.* Zebedee was an obscure man; she, as his wife, was no better. The greatest honour she ever had or could have was to have two such sons as James and John; these give a title to both their parents. Honour ascends as well as descends. Holy children dignify the loins and womb from whence they proceed, no less than their parents traduce honour unto them. Salome might be a good wife, a good housewife, a good woman, a good neighbour: all these cannot ennoble her so much as *The mother of Zebedee's children.*

What a world of pain, toil, care, cost, there is in the birth and education of children! Their good proof requites all with advantage. Next to happiness in ourselves, is, to be happy in a gracious issue.

The suit was the sons', but by the mouth of their mother. It was their best policy to speak by her lips. Even these fishermen had already learned craftily to fish for promotion. Ambition was not so bold in them as to show her own face. The envy of the suit shall thus be avoided which could not but follow upon their personal request. If it were granted, they had what they would; if not, it was but the repulse of a woman's motion, which must needs be so much more pardonable, because it was of a mother for her sons.

It is not discommendable in parents to seek the preferment of their children. Why may not Abraham sue for an Ishmael? So it be by lawful means, in a moderate measure, in due order, this endeavour cannot be amiss. It is the neglect of circumstances that makes these desires sinful. O the madness of those parents, that care not which way they raise an house, that desire rather to leave their children great than good, that are more ambitious to have their sons lords on earth than kings in heaven!

Yet I commend thee, Salome, that thy first plot was to have thy sons disciples of Christ; then, after, to prefer them to the best places of that attendance. It is the true method of divine prudence, O God, first to make our children happy with the honour of thy service, and then to endeavour their meet advancement upon earth.

The mother is but put upon this suit by her sons, their heart was in her lips. They were not so mortified by their continual conversation with Christ, hearing his heavenly doctrine, seeing his divine carriage, but that their minds were yet roving after temporal honours. Pride is the inmost coat which we put off last, and which we put on first. Who can wonder to see some sparks of weak and worldly desires in their holiest teachers, when the blessed apostles were not free from some ambitious thoughts while they sat at the feet, yea, in the bosom of their Saviour?

The near kindred this woman could challenge of Christ might seem to give her just colour of more familiarity; yet now that she comes upon a suit, she submits herself to the lowest gesture of suppliants. We need not be taught that it is fit for petitioners to the great to present their humble supplications upon their knees. O Saviour, if this woman, so nearly allied to thee according to the flesh, coming but upon a temporal occasion to thee, being as then compassed about with human infirmities, adored thee ere she durst sue to thee; what reverence is enough for us,

that come to thee upon spiritual suits, sitting now in the height of heavenly glory and majesty?

Say then, thou wife of Zebedee, what is it that thou cravest of thine omnipotent Kinsman? *A certain thing.* Speak out, woman; what is this certain thing that thou cravest? How poor and weak is this supplicatory anticipation to Him that knew thy thoughts ere thou utteredst them, ere thou entertainedst them! We are all in this tune; every one would have something; such, perhaps, as we are ashamed to utter. The proud man would have a certain thing; honour in the world: the covetous would have a certain thing too; wealth and abundance: the malicious would have a certain thing: revenge on his enemies: the epicure would have pleasure and long life: the barren, children: the wanton, beauty. Each one would be humoured in his own desire; though in variety, yea contradiction to other; though in opposition, not more to God's will than our own good.

How this suit sticks in her teeth, and dare not freely come forth, because it is guilty of its own faultiness! What a difference there is betwixt the prayers of faith and the motions of self-love and infidelity! Those come forth with boldness, as knowing their own welcome, and being well assured both of their warrant and acceptation: these stand blushing at the door, not daring to appear, like to some baffled suit, conscious to its own unworthiness and just repulse. Our inordinate desires are worthy of a check: when we know that our requests are holy, we cannot come with too much confidence to the throne of grace.

He that knew all their thoughts afar off, yet, as if he had been a stranger to their purposes, asks, *What wouldest thou?* Our infirmities do then best shame us, when they are fetched out of our own mouths: like as our prayers also serve not to acquaint God with our wants, but to make us the more capable of his mercies.

The suit is drawn from her. Now she must speak: *Grant, that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, the other on thy left, in thy kingdom.* It is hard to say whether out of more pride or ignorance. It was as received as erroneous a conceit among the very disciples of Christ, that he should raise up a temporal kingdom over the now tributary and beslaved people of Israel. The Romans were now their masters: their fancy was, that their Messias should shake off this yoke, and reduce them to their former liberty. So grounded was this opinion, that the two

disciples in their walk to Emmaus could say, *We trusted it had been he that should have delivered Israel:* and when, after his resurrection, he was walking up Mount Olivet towards heaven, his very apostles could ask him, if he would now restore that long-expected kingdom. How should we mitigate our censures of our Christian brethren, if either they mistake or know not some secondary truths of religion, when the domestic attendants of Christ, who heard him every day till the very point of his Ascension, misapprehended the chief cause of his coming into the world, and the state of his kingdom! If our charity may not bear with small faults, what do we under his name that connived at greater? Truth is as the sun, bright in itself; yet there are many close corners into which it never shined. O God, if thou open our hearts, we shall take in those beams: till thou do so, teach us to attend patiently for ourselves, charitably for others.

These fishermen had so much courtship to know that the right hand and the left of any prince were the chief places of honour. Our Saviour had said, that his twelve followers should sit upon twelve thrones, and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. This good woman would have her two sons next to his person, the prime peers of his kingdom. Every one is apt to wish the best to his own. Worldly honour is neither worth our suit nor unworthy our acceptance. Yea, Salome, had thy mind been in heaven, hadst thou intended this desired preeminence of that celestial state of glory, yet I know not how to justify thine ambition. Wouldst thou have thy sons preferred to the *father of the faithful,* to the blessed mother of thy Saviour? That very wish were presumptuous. For me, O God, my ambition shall go so high as to be a saint in heaven, and to live as holily on earth as the best; but for precedency of heavenly honour, I do not, I dare not affect it. It is enough for me if I may lift up my head amongst the heels of thy blessed ones.

The mother asks; the sons have the answer. She was but their tongue; they shall be her ears. God ever imputes the acts to the first mover rather than to the instrument.

It was a sore check, *Ye know not what ye ask.* In our ordinary communication, to speak idly, is sin; but in our suits to Christ, to be so inconsiderate as not to understand our own petitions, must needs be a foul offence.

As faith is the ground of our prayers, so knowledge is the

ground of our faith. If we come with indigested requests, we profane that name we invoke.

To convince their unfitness for glory, they are sent to their impotency in suffering: *Are ye able to drink of the cup whereof I shall drink; and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?* O Saviour, even thou, who wert one with thy Father, hast a cup of thine own. Never potion was so bitter as that which was mixed for thee. Yea, even thy draught is stinted. It is not enough for thee to sip of this cup, thou must drink it up to the very dregs. When the vinegar and gall were tendered to thee by men, thou didst but kiss the cup; but when thy Father gave into thine hands a potion infinitely more distasteful, thou, for our health, didst drink deep of it, even to the bottom, and saidst, *It is finished.* And can we repine at those unpleasing draughts of affliction that are tempered for us sinful men, when we see thee, the Son of thy Father's love, thus dieted? We pledge thee, O blessed Saviour, we pledge thee, according to our weakness, who hast begun to us in thy powerful sufferings. Only do thou enable us, after some sour faces made in our reluctation, yet at last willingly to pledge thee in our constant sufferings for thee.

As thou must be drenched within, so must thou be baptized without. Thy baptism is not of water, but of blood; both these came from thee in thy passion: we cannot be thine, if we partake not of both. If thou hast not grudged thy precious blood to us, well mayest thou challenge some worthless drops from us.

When they talk of thy kingdom, thou speakest of thy bitter cup, of thy bloody baptism. Suffering is the way to reigning. *Through many tribulations must we enter into the kingdom of heaven.* There was never wedge of gold that did not first pass the fire; there was never pure grain that did not undergo the flail. In vain shall we dream of our immediate passage from the pleasures and jollity of earth to the glory of heaven. Let who will hope to walk upon roses and violets to the throne of heaven, O Saviour, let me trace thee by the track of thy blood, and by thy red steps follow thee to thine eternal rest and happiness.

I know this is no easy task; else thou hadst never said, *Are ye able?* Who should be able, if not they that had been so long blessed with thy presence, informed by thy doctrine, and, as it were, beforehand possessed of their heaven in thee? Thou hadst never made them judges of their power, if thou couldst not have

convinced them of their weakness. Alas, how full of feebleness is our body, and our mind of impatience! If but a bee sting our flesh, it swells; and if but a tooth ache, the head and heart complain. How small trifles make us weary of ourselves! What can we do without thee? Without thee what can we suffer? If thou be not, O Lord, strong in my weakness, I cannot be so much as weak; I cannot so much as be. O do thou prepare me for my day, and enable me to my trials: *I can do all things through* thee *that strengthenest me.*

The motion of the two disciples was not more full of infirmity than their answer, *We are able.* Out of an eager desire of the honour, they are apt to undertake the condition. The best men may be mistaken in their own powers. Alas, poor men! when it came to the issue, they ran away; and I know not whether one without his coat. It is one thing to suffer in speculation; another, in practice. There cannot be a worse sign than for a man in a carnal presumption to vaunt of his own abilities. How justly doth God suffer that man to be foiled purposely, that he may be ashamed of his own vain self-confidence! O God, let me ever be humbly dejected in the sense of mine own insufficiency. Let me give all the glory to thee, and take nothing to myself but my infirmities.

O the wonderful mildness of the Son of God! He doth not rate the two disciples, either for their ambition in suing, or presumption in undertaking; but, leaving the worst, he takes the best of their answer; and, omitting their errors, encourages their good intentions; *Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with my baptism; but to sit on my right hand and my left, is not mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

I know not whether there be more mercy in the concession, or satisfaction in the denial. Were it not an high honour to drink of thy cup, O Saviour, thou hadst not forepromised it as a favour. I am deceived, if what thou grantest were much less than that which thou deniest. To pledge thee in thine own cup is not much less dignity and familiarity than to sit by thee. *If we suffer with thee, we shall also reign together with thee.* What greater promotion can flesh and blood be capable of than a conformity to the Lord of glory? Enable thou me to drink of thy cup, and then set me where thou wilt.

But, O Saviour, while thou dignifiest them in thy grant, dost

thou disparage thyself in thy denial? *Not mine to give?* Whose is it, if not thine? If it be thy Father's, it is thine. Thou who art truth hast said, *I and my Father are one:* yea, because thou art one with the Father, it is not thine to give to any, save those for whom it is prepared of the Father. The Father's preparation was thine, his gift is thine; the decree of both is one. That eternal counsel is not alterable upon our vain desires. The Father gives these heavenly honours to none, but by thee; thou givest them to none, but according to the decree of thy Father. Many degrees there are of celestial happiness. Those supernal mansions are not all of an height. That Providence which hath varied our stations upon earth hath preordered our seats above. O God, admit me within the walls of thy new Jerusalem, and place me wheresoever thou pleasest.

THE TRIBUTE-MONEY PAID.—Matthew xvii.

All these other histories report the power of Christ, this shows both his power and obedience; his power over the creature, his obedience to civil powers.

Capernaum was one of his own cities. There he made his chief abode in Peter's house, (Luke iv. 31, compared with 38:) to that host of his therefore do the toll-gatherers repair for the tribute. When that great disciple said, *We have left all*, he did not say, "We have abandoned all, or sold, or given away all; but we have left, in respect of managing, not of possession; not in respect of right, but of use and present fruition; so left, that upon just occasion we may resume; so left, that it is our due, though not our business." Doubtless, he was too wise to give away his own that he might borrow of a stranger. His own roof gave him shelter for the time, and his Master with him. Of him, as the householder, is the tribute required, and by and for him is it also paid.

I inquire not either into the occasion or the sum. What need we make this exaction sacrilegious? as if that half shekel, which was appointed by God to be paid by every Israelite to the use of the tabernacle and temple were now diverted to the Roman exchequer. There was no necessity that the Roman lords should be tied to the Jewish reckonings. It was free for them to impose what payments they pleased upon a subdued people.

When great Augustus commanded the world to be taxed, this rate was set.

The mannerly collectors demanded it first of him with whom they might be more bold; *Doth not your Master pay tribute?* All Capernaum knew Christ for a great Prophet; his doctrine had ravished them, his miracles had astonished them; yet when it comes to a money matter, his share is as deep as the rest. Questions of profit admit no difference. Still the sacred tribe challengeth reverence: who cares how little they receive, how much they pay? Yet no man knows with what mind this demand was made, whether in a churlish grudging at Christ's immunity, or in an awful compellation of the servant rather than the Master.

Peter had it ready what to answer. I hear him not require their stay till he should go in and know his Master's resolution; but, as one well acquainted with the mind and practice of his Master, he answers *Yes.* There was no truer paymaster of the king's dues than He that was King of kings. Well did Peter know that he did not only give, but preach tribute. When the Herodians laid twigs for him, as supposing that so great a prophet would be all for the liberty and exemption of God's chosen people, he chokes them with their own coin, and told them the stamp argued the right, *Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.* O Saviour, how can thy servants challenge that freedom which thyself had not? who, that pretends from thee, can claim homage from those to whom thou gavest it? If thou, by whom kings reign, forbarest not to pay tribute to a heathen prince, what power under thee can deny it to those that rule for thee?

That demand was made without doors. No sooner is Peter come in than he is prevented by his Master's question, *What thinkest thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth receive tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?* This very interrogation was answer enough to that which Peter meant to move. He that could thus know the heart was not in true right liable to human exactions.

But, O Saviour, may I presume to ask what this is to thee? Thou hast said, *My kingdom is not of this world:* how doth it concern thee what is done by the kings of the earth, or imposed upon the sons of earthly kings? Thou wouldst be the Son of an humble virgin, and choosest not a royal state, but a servile. I dispute not thy natural right to the throne by thy lineal descent

from the loins of Judah and David; what should I plead that which thou waivest? It is thy Divine Royalty and Sonship which thou here justly urgest.

The argument is irrefragable and convictive. "If the kings of the earth do so privilege their children that they are free from all tributes and impositions, how much more shall the King of heaven give this immunity to his only and natural Son? so as in true reason I might challenge an exemption for me and my train."

Thou mightest, O Saviour, and no less challenge a tribute of all the kings of the earth to thee by whom all powers are ordained. Reason cannot mutter against this claim. The creature owes itself, and whatsoever it hath, to the Maker; he owes nothing to it.

Then are the children free. He that hath right to all needs not pay any thing, else there should be a subjection in sovereignty, and men should be debtors to themselves. But this right was thine own peculiar, and admits no partners: why dost thou speak of children as of more, and, extending this privilege to Peter, sayest, *lest we scandalize them?* Was it for that thy disciples, being of thy robe, might justly seem interested in the liberties of their Master? Surely no otherwise were they children, no otherwise free. Away with that fanatical conceit, which challenges an immunity from secular commands and taxes, to a spiritual and adoptative sonship. No earthly saintship can exempt us from tribute to whom tribute belongeth. There is a freedom, O Saviour, which our Christianity calls us to affect; a freedom from the yoke of sin and Satan, from the servitude of our corrupt affections: we cannot be sons, if we be not thus free. O free thou us by thy free Spirit from the miserable bondage of our nature, so shall the children be free; but as to these secular duties, no man is less free than the children.

O Saviour, thou wert free, and wouldst not be so; thou wert free by natural right, wouldst not be free by voluntary dispensation, *lest an offence might be taken.* Surely, had there followed an offence, it had been taken only, and not given. *Woe be to the man by whom the offence cometh:* it cometh by him that gives it; it cometh by him that takes it when it is not given: no part of this blame could have cleaved unto thee either way.

Yet such was thy goodness, that thou wouldst not suffer an offence unjustly taken at that which thou mightest justly have

denied. How jealous should we be even of others' perils! how careful, so to moderate our power in the use of lawful things, that our charity may prevent others' scandals! to remit of our own right for another's safety! O the deplorable condition of those wilful men, who care not what blocks they lay in the way to heaven; not forbearing, by a known lewdness, to draw others into their own damnation!

To avoid the unjust offence even of very publicans, Jesus will work a miracle. Peter is sent to the sea; and that not with a net, but with an hook. The disciple was now in his own trade. He knew a net might enclose many fishes, an hook could take but one: with that hook must he go angle for the tribute-money. A fish shall bring him a stater in her mouth; and that fish that bites first. What an unusual bearer is here! what an unlikely element to yield a piece of ready coin!

O that omnipotent power, which could command the fish ,to be both his treasurer to keep his silver, and his purveyor to bring it! Now whether, O Saviour, thou causedst this fish to take up that shekel out of the bottom of the sea, or whether by thine almighty word thou madest it in an instant in the mouth of that fish, it is neither possible to determine nor necessary to inquire. I rather adore thine infinite knowledge and power, that couldst make use of unlikeliest means; that couldst serve thyself of the very fishes of the sea, in a business of earthly and civil employment.

It was not out of need that thou didst this; though I do not find that thou ever affectedst a full purse; (what veins of gold or mines of silver did not lie open to thy command!) but out of a desire to teach Peter, that, while he would be tributary to Cæsar, the very fish of the sea was tributary to him. How should this encourage our dependence upon that omnipotent hand of thine, which hath heaven, earth, sea, at thy disposing! Still thou art the same for thy members which thou wert for thyself, the Head. Rather than offence shall be given to the world, by a seeming neglect of thy dear children, thou wilt cause the very fowls of heaven to bring them meat, and the fish of the sea to bring them money. O let us look up ever to thee by the eye of our faith; and not be wanting in our dependence upon thee, who canst not be wanting in thy providence over us.

LAZARUS DEAD.—John xi.

O the wisdom of God in penning his own story! The disciple whom Jesus loved comes after his fellow Evangelists, that he might glean up those rich ears of history which the rest had passed over.

That eagle soars high, and towers up by degrees. It was much to turn water into wine; but it was more to feed five thousand with five loaves. It was much to restore the ruler's son; it was more to cure him that had been thirty-eight years a cripple. It was much to cure him that was born blind; it was more to raise up Lazarus that had been so long dead. As a stream runs still the stronger and wider the nearer it comes to the ocean whence it was derived, so didst thou, O Saviour, work the more powerfully the nearer thou drewest to thy glory. This was, as one of thy last, so of thy greatest miracles. When thou wert ready to die thyself, thou raisedst him to life who smelt strong of the grave. None of all the sacred histories is so full and punctual as this, in the report of all circumstances. Other miracles do not more transcend nature than this transcends other miracles.

This alone was a sufficient eviction of thy Godhead, O blessed Saviour. None but an infinite power could so far go beyond nature, as to recall a man, four days dead, from, not a mere privation, but a settled corruption. Earth must needs be thine, from which thou raisest his body; heaven must needs be thine, from whence thou fetchest his spirit. None but he that created man could thus make him new.

Sickness is the common preface to death. No mortal nature is exempted from this complaint. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, is sick. What can strength of grace or dearness of respect prevail against disease, against dissolution?

It was a stirring message that Mary sent to Jesus, *He whom thou lovest is sick:* as if she would imply that his part was no less deep in Lazarus than hers. Neither doth she say, "He that loves thee is sick;" but, *he whom thou lovest:* not pleading the merit of Lazarus's affection to Christ, but the mercy and favour of Christ to him. Even that other reflection of love had been no weak motive; for, O Lord, thou hast said, *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him.* Thy goodness will not be behind us for love, who professest to love them that love

thee. But yet the argument is more forcible from thy love to us, since thou hast just reason to respect every thing of thine own, more than aught that can proceed from us. Even we weak men, what can we stick at where we love? Thou, O infinite God, art love itself: whatever thou hast done for us is out of thy love. The ground and motive of all thy mercies is within thyself, not in us; and if there be aught in us worthy of thy love, it is thine own, not ours: thou givest what thou acceptest.

Jesus well heard the first groan of his dear Lazarus. Every short breath that he drew, every sigh that he gave, was upon account: yet this Lord of life lets his Lazarus sicken and languish, and die; not out of neglect or impotence, but out of power and resolution. *This sickness is not to death:* he to whom the issues of death belong knows the way both into it and out of it. He meant that sickness should be to death in respect of the present condition, not to death in respect of the event; to death in the process of nature, not to death in the success of his Divine power, *that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*

O Saviour, thy usual style is, *the Son of man;* thou, that wouldst take up our infirmities, wert willing thus to hide thy Godhead under the coarse weeds of our humanity; but here thou sayest, *that the Son of God might be glorified.* Though thou wouldst hide thy Divine glory, yet thou wouldst not smother it: sometimes thou wouldst have thy sun break forth in bright gleams, to show that it hath no less light even while it seems kept in by the clouds. Thou wert now near thy passion. It was most seasonable for thee at this time to set forth thy just title. Neither was this an act that thy humanity could challenge to itself; but far transcending all finite powers. To die, was an act of the Son of man; to raise from death, was an act of the Son of God.

Neither didst thou say merely that God, but, *that the Son of God might be glorified.* God cannot be glorified unless the Son be so. In very natural relations, the wrong or disrespect offered to the child reflects upon the father; as contrarily, the parent's upon the child: how much more, where the love and respect is infinite! where the whole essence is communicated with the entireness of relation! O God, in vain shall we tender our devotions to thee indefinitely, as to a glorious and incomprehensible Majesty, if we kiss not the Son, who hath most justly said, *Ye believe in the Father, believe also in Me.*

What an happy family was this! I find none upon earth so

much honoured; *Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.* It is no standing upon terms of precedency: the Spirit of God is not curious in marshalling of places. Time was, when Mary was confessed to have chosen the better part; here Martha is named first, as most interested in Christ's love: for aught appears, all of them were equally dear. Christ had familiarly lodged under their roof: how fit was that to receive him whose indwellers were hospitable, pious, unanimous! Hospitable, in the glad entertainment of Jesus and his train; pious, in their devotions; unanimous in their mutual concord. As contrarily, he balks and hates that house which is taken up with uncharitableness, profaneness, contention.

But, O Saviour, how doth this agree? Thou lovedst this family, yet, hearing of their distress, thou heldest off two days more from them. Canst thou love those thou regardest not? Canst thou regard them from whom thou willingly absentest thyself in their necessity? Behold, thy love, as it is above ours, so it is oft against ours: even out of very affection art thou not seldom absent. None of thine but have sometimes cried, *How long, Lord?* What need we instance, when thine eternal Father did purposely estrange his face from thee, so as thou criedst out of forsaking?

Here thou wouldst knowingly delay, whether for the greatening of the miracle or for the strengthening of thy disciples' faith.

Hadst thou gone sooner, and prevented the death, who had known whether strength of nature, and not thy miraculous power, had done it? Hadst thou overtaken his death by this quickening visitation, who had known whether this had been only some qualm or ecstasy, and not a perfect dissolution? Now this large gap of time makes thy work both certain and glorious.

And what a clear proof was this beforehand to thy disciples, that thou wert able to accomplish thine own resurrection on the third day, who wert able to raise up Lazarus on the fourth! The more difficult the work should be, the more need it had of an omnipotent confirmation.

He that was Lord of our times and his own can now, when he found it seasonable, say, *Let us go into Judea again.* Why left he it before? was it not upon the heady violence of his enemies? (Vide chap. x. ver. 31, 39.) Lo, the stones of the Jews drove him thence; the love of Lazarus and the care of his Divine glory drew him back thither. We may, we must be wise as serpents, for our own preservation; we must be careless of danger, when

God calls us to the hazard. It is far from God's purpose to give us leave so far to respect ourselves, as that we should neglect him. Let Judea be all snares, all crosses; O Saviour, when thou callest us, we must put our lives into our hands, and follow thee thither.

This journey thou hast purposed and contrived; but what needest thou to acquaint thy disciples with thine intent? Where didst thou ever, besides here, make them of counsel with thy voyages? Neither didst thou say, "How think you if I go?" but, *Let us go.* Was it for that thou who knewest thine own strength knewest also their weakness? Thou wert resolute, they were timorous; they were sensible enough of their late peril, and fearful of more; there was need to forearm them with an expectation of the worst, and preparation for it. Surprisal with evils may endanger the best constancy. The heart is apt to fail when it finds itself intrapped in a sudden mischief.

The disciples were dearly affected to Lazarus; they had learned to love where their Master loved; yet now, when our Saviour speaks of returning to that region of peril, they pull him by the sleeve, and put him in mind of the violence offered unto him; *Master, the Jews sought of late to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?*

No less than thrice in the foregoing chapter did the Jews lift up their hands to murder him by a cruel lapidation. Whence was this rage and bloody attempt of theirs? Only for that he taught them the truth concerning his Divine nature, and gave himself the just style of the Son of God. How subject carnal hearts are to be impatient of heavenly verities! Nothing can so much fret that malignant spirit which rules in those breasts, as that Christ should have his own. If we be persecuted for his truth, we do but *suffer with him with whom we shall* once *reign.*

However the disciples pleaded for their Master's safety, yet they aimed at their own. They well knew their danger was inwrapped in his. It is but a cleanly colour that they put upon their own fear. This is held but a weak and base passion. Each one would be glad to put off the opinion of it from himself, and to set the best face upon his own impotency. Thus white-livered men, that shrink and shift from the Cross, will not want fair pretences to evade it. One pleads the peril of many dependents; another, the disfurnishing the Church of succeeding abettors: each will have some plausible excuse for his sound skin.

What error did not our Saviour rectify in his followers? Even that fear which they would have dissembled is graciously dispelled by the just consideration of a sure and inevitable Providence. "*Are there not twelve hours in the day*, which are duly set and proceed regularly, for the direction of all the motions and actions of men? So in this course of mine, which I must run on earth, there is a set and determined time wherein I must work, and do my Father's will. The sun, that guides these hours, is the determinate counsel of my Father, and his calling to the execution of my charge: while I follow that, I cannot miscarry, no more than a man can miss his known way at high noon: this while, in vain are either your dissuasions or the attempts of enemies; they cannot hurt, ye cannot divert me."

The journey then holds to Judea: his attendants shall be made acquainted with the occasion. He that had formerly denied the deadliness of Lazarus's sickness, would not suddenly confess his death; neither yet would he altogether conceal it: so will he therefore confess it, as that he will shadow it out in a borrowed expression; *Lazarus our friend sleepeth.*

What a sweet title is here both of death and of Lazarus! Death is a sleep; Lazarus is our friend. Lo, he says not, "my friend," but *ours;* to draw them first into a gracious familiarity and communion of friendship with himself: for what doth this import, but, "Ye are my friends, and Lazarus is both my friend and yours! *Our friend.*" O meek and merciful Saviour, that disdainest not to stoop so low, as that while thou *thoughtest it no robbery to be equal unto God* thou thoughtest it no disparagement to match thyself with weak and wretched men! *Our friend Lazarus.* There is a kind of parity in friendship. There may be love where is the most inequality; but friendship supposes pairs: yet the Son of God says of the sons of men, *Our friend Lazarus.* O what an high and happy condition is this for mortal men to aspire unto, that the God of heaven should not be ashamed to own them for friends! Neither saith he now abruptly, "Lazarus our friend is dead;" but, *Lazarus our friend sleepeth.*

O Saviour, none can know the estate of life or death so well as thou, that art the Lord of both. It is enough that thou tellest us death is no other than sleep. That which was wont to pass for the cousin of death is now itself. All this while we have mistaken the case of our dissolution: we took it for an

enemy, it proves a friend: there is pleasure in that wherein we supposed horror. Who is afraid, after the weary toils of the day, to take his rest by night? or what is more refreshing to the spent traveller than a sweet sleep? It is our infidelity, our impreparation, that makes death any other than advantage. Even so, Lord, when thou seest I have toiled enough, let me sleep in peace; and when thou seest I have slept enough, awake me as thou didst thy Lazarus; *But I go to awake him.*

Thou saidst not, "Let us go to awake him." Those whom thou wilt allow companions of thy way thou wilt not allow partners of thy work: they may be witnesses; they cannot be actors. None can awake Lazarus out of this sleep but he that made Lazarus. Every mouse or gnat can raise us up from that other sleep; none but an omnipotent power from this. This sleep is not without a dissolution. Who can command the soul to come down and meet the body, or command the body to piece with itself, and rise up to the soul, but the God that created both? It is our comfort and assurance, O Lord, against the terrors of death and tenacity of the grave, that our resurrection depends upon none but thine omnipotence.

Who can blame the disciples, if they were loath to return to Judea? Their last entertainment was such as might justly dishearten them. Were this, as literally taken, all the reason of our Saviour's purpose of so perilous a voyage, they argued not amiss, *If he sleep, he shall do well.* Sleep in sickness is a good sign of recovery: for extremity of pain bars our rest: when nature therefore finds so much respiration, she justly hopes for better terms. Yet it doth not always follow, *If he sleep, he shall do well.* How many have died in lethargies! how many have lost in sleep what they would not have foregone waking! Adam slept, and lost his rib; Samson slept, and lost his strength; Saul slept, and lost his weapon; Ishbosheth and Holofernes slept, and lost their heads. In ordinary course, it holds well: here, they mistook and erred. The misconstruction of the words of Christ led them into an unseasonable and erroneous suggestion. Nothing can be more dangerous than to take the speeches of Christ according to the sound of the letter: one error will be sure to draw on more; and if the first be never so slight, the last may be important.

Wherefore are words but to express meanings? Why do we speak, but to be understood? Since then our Saviour saw himself not rightly construed, he delivers himself plainly. *Lazarus is dead.*

Such is thy manner, O thou Eternal Word of thy Father, in all thy sacred expressions. Thine own mouth is thy best commentary: what thou hast more obscurely said in one passage, thou interpretest more clearly in another. Thou art the Sun which givest us that light whereby we see thyself.

But how modestly dost thou discover thy Deity to thy disciples! not, upon the first mention of Lazarus's death, instantly professing thy power and will of his resuscitation; but, contenting thyself only to intimate thy omniscience, in that thou couldst in that absence and distance know and report his departure, they shall gather the rest, and cannot choose but think, "We serve a Master that knows all things; and he that knows all things can do all things."

The absence of our Saviour from the death-bed of Lazarus was not casual, but voluntary; yea, he is not only willing with it, but glad of it; *I am glad, for your sakes, that I was not there.* How contrary may the affections of Christ and ours be, and yet be both good! The two worthy sisters were much grieved at our Saviour's absence, as doubting it might savour of some neglect; Christ was glad of it, for the advantage of his disciples' faith. I cannot blame them, that they were thus sorry; I cannot but bless him, that he was thus glad. The gain of their faith in so Divine a miracle was more than could be countervailed by their momentary sorrow. God and we are not alike affected with the same events: He laughs where we mourn; He is angry where we are pleased.

The difference of the affections arises from the difference of the objects which Christ and they apprehend in the same occurrence. Why are the sisters sorrowful? because, upon Christ's absence, Lazarus died. Why was Jesus glad he was not there? for the benefit which he saw would accrue to their faith. There is much variety of prospect in every act, according to the several intentions and issues thereof; yea, even in the very same eyes. The father sees his son combating in a duel for his country: he sees blows and wounds on the one side, he sees renown and victory on the other; he grieves at the wounds, he rejoices in the honour. Thus doth God in all our afflictions: he sees our tears, and hears our groans, and pities us; but, withal, he looks upon our patience, our faith, our crown, and is glad that we are afflicted. O God, why should not we conform our diet unto thine? When we lie in pain and extremity, we cannot but droop under it; but do we find

ourselves increased in true mortification, in patience, in hope, in a constant reliance on thy mercies? Why are we not more joyed in this than dejected with the other? since the least grain of the increase of grace is more worth, than can be equalled with whole pounds of bodily vexation.

O strange consequence! *Lazarus is dead;* nevertheless, *Let us go unto him.* Must they not needs think, "What should we do with a dead man? what should separate, if death cannot?" Even those whom we loved dearliest, we avoid, once dead. Now we lay them aside under the board, and thence send them out of our houses to their grave. Neither hath death more horror in it than noisomeness; and if we could entreat our eyes to endure the horrid aspect of death in the face we loved, yet can we persuade our scent to like that smell that arises up from their corruption? O *love stronger than death!* Behold here a friend, whom the very grave cannot sever. Even those that write the longest and most passionate dates of their amity subscribe but, *your friend till death;* and if the ordinary strain of human friendship will stretch yet a little further, it is but to the brim of the grave: thither a friend may follow us, and see us bestowed in this house of our age; but there he leaves us to our worms and dust. But for thee, O Saviour, the gravestone, the earth, the coffin are no bounders of thy dear respects: even after death and burial and corruption thou art graciously affected to those thou lovest. Besides the soul (whereof thou sayest not, "Let us go to it," but, "Let it come to us,") there is still a gracious regard to that dust, which was and shall be a part of an undoubted member of that mystical body whereof thou art the Head. Heaven and earth yields no such friend, but thyself. O make me ever ambitious of this love of thine, and ever unquiet, till I feel myself possessed of thee.

In the mouth of a mere man this word had been incongruous, *Lazarus is dead, yet let us go to him;* in thine, O almighty Saviour, it was not more loving than seasonable, since I may justly say of thee, thou hast more to do with the dead than with the living: for both they are infinitely more, and have more inward communion with thee and thou with them. Death cannot hinder either our passage to thee or thy return to us. I joy to think the time is coming when thou shalt come to every of our graves, and call us up out of our dust, and we *shall hear thy voice, and live.*

LAZARUS RAISED.—John xi.

Great was the opinion that these devout sisters had of the power of Christ: as if death durst not show her face to him, they suppose his presence had prevented their brother's dissolution. And now, the news of his approach begins to quicken some late hopes in them.

Martha was ever the more active: she that was before so busily stirring in her house to entertain Jesus, was now as nimble to go forth of her house to meet him: she in whose face joy had wont to smile upon so blessed a guest, now salutes him with the sighs and tears and blubbers and wrings of a disconsolate mourner.

I know not whether the speeches of her greeting had in them more sorrow or religion. She had been well catechized before. Even she also had sat at Jesus's feet, and can now give good account of her faith in the power and godhead of Christ, in the certainty of a future resurrection. This conference hath yet taught her more, and raised her heart to an expectation of some wonderful effect.

And now she stands not still, but hastes back into the village to her sister, carried thither by the two wings of her own hopes and her Saviour's commands. The time was, when she would have called off her sister from the feet of that Divine Master to attend the household occasions; now she runs to fetch her out of the house to the feet of Christ.

Doubtless, Martha was much affected with the presence of Christ; and, as she was overjoyed with it herself, so she knew how equally welcome it would be to her sister: yet she doth not ring it out aloud in the open hall, but secretly whispers this pleasing tidings in her sister's ear, *The Master is come, and calleth for thee;* whether out of modesty or discretion. It is not fit for a woman to be loud and clamorous. Nothing beseems that sex better than silence and bashfulness; as not to be too much seen, so not to be heard too far. Neither did modesty more charm her tongue than discretion; whether in respect to the guests or to Christ himself. Had those guests heard of Christ's being there, they had, either out of fear or prejudice, withdrawn themselves from him: neither durst they have been witnesses of that wonderful miracle, as being overawed with that Jewish edict which was out against him; or perhaps they had withheld the

sisters from going to him, against whom they knew how highly their governors were incensed. Neither was she ignorant of the danger of his own person, so lately before assaulted violently by his enemies at Jerusalem. She knew they were within the smoke of that bloody city, the nest of his enemies; she holds it not therefore fit to make open proclamation of Christ's presence, but rounds her sister secretly in the ear. Christianity doth not bid us abate any thing of our wariness and honest policies; yea, it requires us to have no less of the serpent than of the dove. There is a time when we must preach Christ on the housetop; there is a time when we must speak him in the ear, and, as it were, with our lips shut. Secrecy hath no less use than divulgation.

She said enough, *The Master is come, and calleth for thee.* What an happy word was this, which was here spoken! What an high favour is this that is done, that the Lord of life should personally come and call for Mary! yet such as is not appropriated to her. Thou comest to us still, O Saviour; if not in thy bodily presence, yet in thy spiritual: thou callest us still, if not in thy personal voice, yet in thine ordinances. It is our fault if we do not, as this good woman, arise quickly, and come to thee. Her friends were there about her, who came purposely to condole with her; her heart was full of heaviness; yet so soon as she hears mention of Christ, she forgets friends, brother, grief, cares, thoughts, and hastes to his presence.

Still was Jesus standing in the place where Martha left him: whether it be noted to express Mary's speed or his own wise and gracious resolutions; his presence in the village had perhaps invited danger, and set off the intended witnesses of the work: or it may be, to set forth his zealous desire to despatch the errand he came for; that, as Abraham's faithful servant would not receive any courtesy from the house of Bethuel, till he had done his master's business concerning Rebekah, so thou, O Saviour, wouldst not so much as enter into the house of these two sisters in Bethany, till thou hadst effected the glorious work which occasioned thee thither. It was thy *meat and drink to do the will of thy Father.* Thy best entertainment was within thyself. How do we follow thee, if we suffer either pleasures or profits to take the wall of thy services?

So good women were well worthy of kind friends. No doubt, Bethany, being not two miles distant from Jerusalem, could not but be furnished with good acquaintance from the city. These,

knowing the dearness, and hearing of the death of Lazarus, came over to comfort the sad sisters. Charity, together with the common practice of that nation, calls them to this duty. All our distresses expect these good offices from those that love us; but, of all others, death, as that which is the extremest of evils, and makes the most fearful havock in families, cities, kingdoms, worlds. The complaint was grievous, *I looked for some to comfort me, but there was none.* It is some kind of ease to sorrow, to have partners; as a burden is lightened by many shoulders, or as clouds, scattered into many drops, easily vent their moisture into air; yea, the very presence of friends abates grief. The peril that arises to the heart from passion is the fixedness of it, when, like a corrosiving plaister, it eats in into the sore. Some kind of remedy it is, that it may breathe out in good society.

These friendly neighbours, seeing Mary hasten forth, make haste to follow her. Martha went forth before; I saw none go after her: Mary stirs; they are at her heels. Was it for that Martha, being the elder sister and the housewife of the family, might stir about with less observation? or was it, that Mary was the more passionate, and needed the more heedy attendance? However, their care and intentiveness is truly commendable: they came to comfort her; they do what they came for. It contents them not to sit still and chat within doors, but they wait on her at all turns. Perturbations of mind are diseases. Good keepers do not only tend the patient in bed, but when he sits up, when he tries to walk; all his motions have their careful assistance. We are no true friends, if our endeavours of the redress of distempers in them we love be not assiduous and unweariable.

It was but a loving suspicion, *She is gone to the grave to weep there.* They well knew how apt passionate minds are to take all occasions to renew their sorrow. Every object affects them. When she saw but the chamber of her dead brother, straight she thinks, "There Lazarus was wont to lie," and then she wept afresh; when the table, "There Lazarus was wont to sit," and then new tears arise; when the garden, "There Lazarus had wont to walk," and now again she weeps. How much more do these friends suppose the passions would be stirred with the sight of the grave, when she must needs think, "There is Lazarus!" O Saviour, if the place of the very dead corpse of our friend have power to draw our hearts thither, and to affect us more deeply, how should our hearts be drawn to and affected with heaven, where thou

sittest at the right hand of thy Father! There, O thou *which wert dead and art alive*, is thy body and thy soul present, and united to thy glorious Deity. Thither, O thither, let our access be; not to mourn there, where is no place for sorrow; but to rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious, and more and more to long for thy beatifical presence.

Their indulgent love mistook Mary's errand. Their thoughts, how kind soever, were much too low. While they supposed she went to a dead brother, she went to a living Saviour. The world hath other conceits of the actions and carriage of the regenerate than are truly intended; setting such constructions upon them as their own carnal reason suggests. They think them dying, when behold they live; sorrowful, when they are always rejoicing; poor, while they make many rich. How justly do we appeal from them, as incompetent judges; and pity those misinterpretations which we cannot avoid!

Both the sisters met Christ; not both in one posture: Mary is still noted, as for more passion, so for more devotion; she, that before sat at the feet of Jesus, now falls at his feet. That presence had wont to be familiar to her, and not without some outward homeliness; now it fetches her upon her knees, in an awful veneration: whether out of a reverent acknowledgment of the secret excellency and power of Christ, or out of a dumb intimation of that suit concerning her dead brother which she was afraid to utter. The very gesture itself was supplicatory. What position of body can be so fit for us, when we make our address to our Saviour? It is an irreligious unmannerliness for us to go less. Where the heart is affected with the awful acknowledgment of Majesty, the body cannot but bow.

Even before all her neighbours of Jerusalem doth Mary thus fall down at the feet of Jesus. So many witnesses as she had, so many spies she had of that forbidden observance. It was no less than excommunication for anybody to confess him: yet good Mary, not fearing the informations that might be given by those Jewish gossips, adores him; and, in her silent gesture, says as much as her sister had spoken before, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.* Those that would give Christ his right must not stand upon scrupulous fears. Are we naturally timorous? why do we not fear the denial, the exclusion of the Almighty? *Without, shall be the fearful.*

Her humble prostration is seconded by a lamentable complaint;

Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. The sisters are both in one mind, both in one speech, and both of them in one speech bewray both strength and infirmity: strength of faith, in ascribing so much power to Christ, that his presence could preserve from death; infirmity, in supposing the necessity of a presence for this purpose. Why, Mary, could not thine omnipotent Saviour as well in absence have commanded Lazarus to live? Is his hand so short, that he can do nothing but by contaction? If his power were finite, how could he have forbidden the seizure of death? if infinite, how could it be limited to place or hindered by distance? It is a weakness of faith to measure success by means, and means by presence, and to tie effects to both, when we deal with an Almighty agent. Finite causes work within their own sphere: all places are equally near, and all effects equally easy to the Infinite. O Saviour, while thou now sittest gloriously in heaven, thou dost no less impart thyself unto us, than if thou stoodst visibly by us, than if we stood locally by thee: no place can make difference of thy virtue and aid.

This was Mary's moan: no motion, no request sounded from her to her Saviour. Her silent suit is returned with a mute answer. No notice is taken of her error. O that marvellous mercy that connives at our faulty infirmities! All the reply that I hear of is a compassionate groan within himself. O Blessed Jesu, thou that wert free from all sin wouldst not be free from strong affections. Wisdom and holiness should want much work if even vehement passions might not be quitted from offence. Mary wept: her tears drew on tears from her friends: all their tears united drew groans from thee. Even in thine heaven thou dost no less pity our sorrows. Thy glory is free from groans, but abounds with compassion and mercy. If we be not sparing of our tears, thou canst not be insensible of our sorrows. How shall we imitate thee, if, like our looking-glass, we do not answer tears, and weep on them that weep upon us?

Lord, thou knewest in absence that Lazarus was dead, and dost thou not know where he was buried? Surely thou wert farther off when thou sawest and reportedst his death than thou wert from the grave thou inquiredst of. Thou that knewest all things yet askest what thou knowest, *Where have ye laid him?* Not out of need, but out of will; that as in thy sorrow, so in thy question, thou mightest depress thyself in the opinion of the beholders for the time, that the glory of thine instant miracle might

be the greater the less it was expected. It had been all one to thy Omnipotence to have made a new Lazarus out of nothing; or, in that remoteness, to have commanded Lazarus, wheresoever he was, to come forth: but thou wert neither willing to work more miracle than was requisite, nor yet unwilling to fix the minds of the people upon the expectation of some marvellous thing that thou meantest to work, and therefore askest, *Where have you laid him?*

They are not more glad of the question than ready for the answer; *Come, and see.* It was the manner of the Jews, as likewise of those Egyptians among whom they had sojourned, to lay up the dead bodies of their friends with great respect. More cost was wont to be bestowed on some of their graves than on their houses. As neither ashamed then, nor unwilling, to show the decency of their sepulture, they say, *Come, and see.* More was hoped for from Christ than a mere view. They meant and expected that his eye should draw him on to some further action. O Saviour, while we desire our spiritual resuscitation, how should we labour to bring thee to our grave! how should we lay open our deadness before thee, and bewray to thee our impotence and senselessness! Come, Lord, and see what a miserable carcass I am, and by the power of thy mercy raise me from the state of my corruption.

Never was our Saviour more submissly dejected than now, immediately before he would approve and exalt the majesty of his Godhead. To his groans and inward grief he adds his tears. Anon, they shall confess him a God: these expressions of passions shall onwards evince him to be a man.

The Jews construe this well; *See how he loved him.* Never did any thing but love fetch tears from Christ. But they do foully misconstrue Christ in the other; *Could not he, that opened the eyes of him that was born blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?* Yes, know ye, O vain and importune questionists, that he could have done it with ease. To open the eyes of a man born blind was more than to keep a sick man from dying; this were but to uphold and maintain nature from decaying; that were to create a new sense, and to restore a deficiency in nature. To make an eye was no whit less difficult than to make a man: he that could do the greater might well have done the less. Ye shall soon see this was not for want of power. Had ye said, "Why would he not? why did he not?" the question had

been fairer, and the answer no less easy—for his own greater glory. Little do ye know the drift whether of God's acts or delays, and ye know as much as you are worthy. Let it be sufficient for you to understand, that he who can do all things will do that which shall be most for his own honour.

It is not improbable, that Jesus, who before groaned in himself for compassion of their tears, now groaned for their incredulity. Nothing could so much afflict the Saviour of men as the sins of men. Could their external wrongs to his body have been separated from offence against his Divine Person, their scornful indignities had not so much affected him. No injury goes so deep as our spiritual provocations of our God. Wretched men! why should we grieve the good Spirit of God in us? why should we make him groan for us that died to redeem us?

With these groans, O Saviour, thou camest to the grave of Lazarus. The door of that house of death was strong and impenetrable. Thy first word was, *Take away the stone.* O weak beginning of a mighty miracle! If thou meantest to raise the dead, how much more easy had it been for thee to remove the gravestone! One grain of faith in thy very disciples was enough to remove mountains, and dost thou say, *Take away the stone?* I wis there was a greater weight that lay upon the body of Lazarus than the stone of his tomb, the weight of death and corruption: a thousand rocks and hills were not so heavy a load as this alone: why then dost thou stick at this shovelful? Yea, how easy had it been for thee to have brought up the body of Lazarus through the stone by causing that marble to give way by a sudden rarefaction? But thou thoughtest best to make use of their hands rather: whether for their own more full conviction; for had the stone been taken away by thy followers, and Lazarus thereupon walked forth, this might have appeared to thy malignant enemies to have been a set match betwixt thee, thy disciples, and Lazarus: or whether for the exercise of our faith, that thou mightest teach us to trust thee under contrary appearances.

Thy command to remove the stone seemed to argue an impotence: straight that seeming weakness breaks forth into an act of Omnipotent power. The homeliest shows of thine human infirmity are ever seconded with some mighty proofs of thy Godhead; and thy miracle is so much more wondered at by how much it was less expected.

It was ever thy just will that we should do what we may. To remove the stone or to untie the napkin was in their power; this they must do: to raise the dead was out of their power; this therefore thou wilt do alone. Our hands must do their utmost ere thou wilt put to thine.

O Saviour, we are all dead and buried in the grave of our sinful nature. The stone of obstination must be taken away from our hearts ere we can hear thy reviving voice: we can no more remove this stone, than dead Lazarus could remove his; we can add more weight to our graves. O let thy faithful agents, by the power of thy Law and the grace of thy Gospel take off the stone, that thy voice may enter into the grave of miserable corruption.

Was it a modest kind of mannerliness in Martha, that she would not have Christ annoyed with the ill scent of that stale carcass? or was it out of distrust of reparation, since her brother had passed all the degrees of corruption, that she says, *Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days?* He that understood hearts found somewhat amiss in that intimation: his answer had not endeavoured to rectify that which was utterly faultless. I fear the good woman meant to object this, as a likely obstacle to any further purposes or proceedings of Christ. Weak faith is still apt to lay blocks of difficulties in the way of the great works of God.

Four days were enough to make any corpse noisome. Death itself is not unsavoury; immediately upon dissolution the body retains the wonted sweetness; it is the continuance under death that is thus offensive. Neither is it otherwise in our spiritual condition: the longer we lie under our sin, the more rotten and corrupt we are. He who upon the fresh commission of his sin recovers himself by a speedy repentance yields no ill scent to the nostrils of the Almighty. The candle that is presently blown in again offends not; it is the snuff which continues choked with its own moisture that sends up unwholesome and odious fumes. O Saviour, thou wouldst yield to death, thou wouldst not yield to corruption; ere the fourth day, thou wert risen again. I cannot but receive many deadly foils; but, O, do thou raise me up again ere I shall pass the degrees of rottenness in my sins and trespasses.

They that laid their hands to the stone doubtless held now still a while, and looked one while on Christ, another while upon Martha, to hear what issue of resolution would follow upon so important an objection; when they find a light touch of taxation to Martha,

Said not I to thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God? That holy woman had before professed her belief, as Christ had professed his great intentions; both were now forgotten: and now our Saviour is fain to revive both her memory and faith; *Said not I to thee?* The best of all saints are subject to fits of unbelief and oblivion; the only remedy whereof must be the inculcation of God's merciful promises of their relief and supportation. O God, if thou hast said it, I dare believe; I dare cast my soul upon the belief of every word of thine: *Faithful art thou which hast promised, who wilt also do it.*

In spite of all the unjust discouragements of nature, we must obey Christ's command. Whatever Martha suggests, they remove the stone; and may now see and smell him dead, whom they shall soon see revived. The scent of the corpse is not so unpleasing to them as the perfume of their obedience is sweet to Christ. And now, when all impediments are removed, and all hearts ready for the work, our Saviour addresses to the miracle.

His *eyes* begin; they are *lift up* to heaven. It was the malicious mis-suggestion of his enemies, that he looked down to Beelzebub: the beholders shall now see whence he expects and derives his power; and shall by him learn whence to expect and hope for all success. The heart and the eye must go together: he that would have aught to do with God must be sequestered and lifted up from earth.

His tongue seconds his eye; *Father.* Nothing more stuck in the stomach of the Jews than that Christ called himself the Son of God; this was imputed to him for a blasphemy worthy of stones. How seasonably is this word spoken in the hearing of these Jews, in whose sight he will be presently approved so! How can ye now, O ye cavillers, except at that title which ye shall see irrefragably justified? Well may he call God *Father* that can raise the dead out of the grave. In vain shall ye snarl at the style, when ye are convinced of the effect.

I hear of no prayer, but a thanks for hearing. While thou saidst nothing, O Saviour, how doth thy Father hear thee? Was it not with thy Father and thee as it was with thee and Moses? Thou saidst, *Let me alone, Moses,* when he spake not. Thy will was thy prayer. Words express our hearts to men, thoughts to God. Well didst thou know, out of the selfsameness of thy will with thy Father's, that if thou didst but think in thy heart that Lazarus should rise, he was now raised. It was not for thee to

pray vocally and audibly, lest those captious hearers should say thou didst all by entreaty, nothing by power. Thy thanks overtake thy desires, ours require time and distance; our thanks arise from the echo of our prayers resounding from heaven to our hearts; thou, because thou art at once in earth and heaven, and knowest the grant to be of equal paces with the request, most justly thankest in praying.

Now ye cavilling Jews are thinking straight, "Is there such distance betwixt the Father and the Son? Is it so rare a thing for the Son to be heard, that he pours out his thanks for it as a blessing unusual? Do ye not now see, that he who made your heart knows it, and anticipates your fond thoughts with the same breath? *I knew that thou hearest me always, but I said this for their sakes, that they might believe.*

Merciful Saviour, how can we enough admire thy goodness, who makest our belief the scope and drift of thy doctrine and actions! Alas! what wert thou the better, if they believed thee sent from God? what wert thou the worse, if they believed it not? Thy perfection and glory stands not upon the slippery terms of our approbation or dislike, but is real in thyself, and that infinite, without possibility of our increase or diminution. We, we only are they that have either the gain or loss in thy receipt or rejection; yet so dost thou affect our belief, as if it were more thine advantage than ours.

O Saviour, while thou spakest to thy Father, thou liftedst up thine eyes; now thou art to speak unto dead Lazarus, thou liftedst up thy voice, and *criedst aloud, Lazarus, come forth.* Was it that the strength of the voice might answer to the strength of the affection? since we faintly require what we care not to obtain, and vehemently utter what we earnestly desire. Was it that the greatness of the voice might answer to the greatness of the work? Was it that the hearers might be witnesses of what words were used in so miraculous an act; no magical incantations, but authoritative and divine commands? Was it to signify that Lazarus's soul was called from far? the speech must be loud that shall be heard in another world. Was it in relation to the estate of the body of Lazarus, whom thou hadst reported to sleep, since those that are in a deep and dead sleep cannot be awaked without a loud call? Or was it in a representation of that loud voice of the last trumpet which shall sound into all graves, and raise all flesh from their dust. Even so still, Lord, when thou wouldst raise a

soul from the death of sin and grave of corruption, no easy voice will serve. Thy strongest commands, thy loudest denunciations of judgments, the shrillest and sweetest promulgations of thy mercies are but enough.

How familiar a word is this, *Lazarus, come forth!* no other than he was wont to use while they lived together. Neither doth he say, "Lazarus, revive;" but, as if he supposed him already living, *Lazarus, come forth:* to let them know that those who are dead to us, are to and with him alive; yea in a more entire and feeling society than while they carried their clay about them. Why do I fear that separation, which shall more unite me to my Saviour?

Neither was the word more familiar than commanding; *Lazarus, come forth.* Here is no suit to his Father, no adjuration to the deceased, but a flat and absolute injunction, *Come forth.* O Saviour, that is the voice that I shall once hear sounding into the bottom of my grave, and raising me up out of my dust: that is the voice that shall pierce the rocks, and divide the mountains, and fetch up the dead out of the lowest deeps. Thy word made all, thy word shall repair all. Hence, all ye diffident fears! He whom I trust is omnipotent.

It was the Jewish fashion to inwrap the corpse in linen, to tie the hands and feet, and to cover the face of the dead. The fall of man, besides weakness, brought shame upon him: ever since, even while he lives, the whole body is covered; but the face, because some sparks of that extinct majesty remain there, is wont to be left open. In death, all those poor remainders being gone, and leaving deformity and ghastliness in the room of them, the face is covered also.

There lies Lazarus, bound in double fetters. One almighty word hath loosed both; and now, *He that was bound came forth.* He, whose power could not be hindered by the chains of death, cannot be hindered by linen bonds. He that gave life, gave motion, gave direction. He that guided the soul of Lazarus into the body, guided the body of Lazarus without his eyes, moved the feet without the full liberty of his regular paces. No doubt the same power slackened those swathing-bands of death, that the feet might have some little scope to move, though not with that freedom that followed after.

Thou didst not only, O Saviour, raise the body of Lazarus, but the faith of the beholders. They cannot deny him dead whom they saw rising. They see the signs of death with the proofs

of life. Those very swathes convinced him to be the man that was raised. Thy less miracle confirms the greater; both confirm the faith of the beholders.

O clear and irrefragable example of our resuscitation! Say now, ye shameless Sadducees, with what face can ye deny the resurrection of the body, when ye see Lazarus, after four days' death, rising up out of his grave? And if Lazarus did thus start up at the bleating of this Lamb of God, that was now every day preparing for the slaughterhouse; how shall the dead be raised up out of their graves, by the roaring of that glorious and immortal Lion, whose voice shall shake the powers of heaven, and move the very foundations of the earth!

With what strange amazedness, do we think, that Martha and Mary, the Jews and the disciples, looked to see Lazarus come in his windingsheet, shackled with his linen fetters, and walk forth towards them! Doubtless, fear and horror strove in them, whether should be for the time more predominant. We love our friends dearly; but to see them again after their known death, and that in the very robes of the grave, must needs set up the hair in a kind of uncouth rigour.

And now, though it had been most easy for him, that brake the adamantine fetters of death, to have broke in pieces those linen ligaments wherewith his raised Lazarus was encumbered, yet he will not do it but by their hands. He that said, *Remove the stone*, said, *Loose Lazarus*. He will not have us expect his immediate help in that we can do for ourselves. It is both a laziness, and a presumptuous tempting of God, to look for an extraordinary and supernatural help from God where he hath enabled us with common aid.

What strange salutations do we think there were betwixt Lazarus and Christ that had raised him, betwixt Lazarus and his sisters and neighbours and friends! what amazed looks! what unusual compliments! For Lazarus was himself at once: here was no leisure of degrees to reduce him to his wonted perfection; neither did he stay to rub his eyes, and stretch his benumbed limbs, nor take time to put off that dead sleep wherewith he had been seized, but instantly he is both alive and fresh and vigorous: if they do but let him go, he walks so as if he had ailed nothing; and receives and gives mutual gratulations. I leave them, entertaining each other with glad embraces, with discourses of reciprocal admiration, with praises and adorations of that God and Saviour that had fetched him into life.

CHRIST'S PROCESSION TO THE TEMPLE.

Matthew xxi.

Never did our Saviour take so much state upon him as now that he was going towards his Passion; other journeys he measured on foot, without noise or train; this, with a princely equipage and loud acclamation. Wherein yet, O Saviour, whether shall I more wonder at thy majesty or thine humility: that Divine majesty, which lay hid under so humble appearance; or that sincere humility, which veiled so great a glory?

Thou, O Lord, whose *chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels*, wouldst make choice of the silliest of beasts to carry thee in thy last and royal progress. How well is thy birth suited with thy triumph! Even that very ass, whereon thou rodest, was prophesied of; neither couldst thou have made up those vatical predictions without this conveyance. O glorious and yet homely pomp!

Thou wouldst not lose aught of thy right; thou, that wast a King, wouldst be proclaimed so: but, that it might appear thy kingdom was not of this world, thou, that couldst have commanded all worldly magnificence, thoughtest fit to abandon it.

Instead of the kings of the earth, who, reigning by thee, might have been employed in thine attendance, the people are thine heralds. Their homely garments are thy footcloth and carpets; their green boughs, the strewings of thy way. Those palms, which were wont to be borne in the hands of them that triumph, are strewed under the feet of thy beast. It was thy greatness and honour to contemn those glories which worldly hearts were wont to admire.

Justly did thy followers hold the best ornaments of the earth worthy of no better than thy treading upon; neither could they ever account their garments so rich, as when they had been trampled upon by thy carriage. How happily did they think their backs disrobed for thy way! how gladly did they spend their breath in acclaiming thee! *Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* Where now are the great masters of the synagogue, that had enacted the ejection of whosoever should confess Jesus to be the Christ? Lo here bold and undaunted clients of the Messiah, that dare proclaim him in the public road, in the open streets. In vain shall the impotent enemies of Christ hope to suppress his glory: as

soon shall they with their hand hide the face of the sun from shining to the world, as withhold the beams of his Divine truth from the eyes of men by their envious opposition. In spite of all Jewish malignity, his kingdom is confessed, applauded, blessed. *O thou fairer than the children of men, in thy Majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.*

In this princely and yet poor and despicable pomp doth our Saviour enter the famous city of Jerusalem; Jerusalem, noted of old for the seat of kings, priests, prophets: of kings, for there was the throne of David; of priests, for there was the temple; of prophets, for there they delivered their errands, and left their blood. Neither know I whether it were more wonder for a prophet to perish out of Jerusalem or to be safe there. Thither would Jesus come as a King, as a Priest, as a Prophet; acclaimed, as a King; teaching the people, and foretelling the woful vastation of it, as a Prophet; and, as a Priest, taking possession of his temple, and vindicating it from the foul profanations of Jewish sacrilege.

Oft before had he come to Jerusalem without any remarkable change, because without any semblance of state; now, that he gives some little glimpse of his royalty, *the whole city was moved.* When the Sages of the East brought the first news of the King of the Jews, *Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him:* and now, that the King of the Jews comes himself, though in so mean a port, there is a new commotion. The silence and obscurity of Christ never troubles the world; he may be an underling, without any stir: but if he do but put forth himself never so little, to bear the least sway amongst men, now their blood is up; the whole city is moved. Neither is it otherwise in the private economy of the soul. O Saviour, while thou dost, as it were, hide thyself, and lie still in the heart, and takest all terms contentedly from us, we entertain thee with no other than a friendly welcome; but when thou once beginnest to ruffle with our corruptions, and to exercise thy spiritual power in the subjugation of our vile affections, now all is in a secret uproar, all the angles of the heart are moved.

Although, doubtless, this commotion was not so much of tumult as of wonder. As when some uncouth sight presents itself in a populous street, men run, and gaze, and throng, and inquire; the feet, the tongue, the eyes walk; one spectator draws on an-

other, one asks and presses another; the noise increases with the concourse, each helps to stir up others' expectation: such was this of Jerusalem.

What means this strangeness? Was not Jerusalem the Spouse of Christ? had he not chosen her out of all the earth? had he not begotten many children of her as the pledges of their love? How justly mayest thou now, O Saviour, complain, with that mirror of patience, *My breath was grown strange to my own wife, though I entreated her for the children's sake of my own body!* Even of thee is that fulfilled which thy chosen vessel said of thy ministers, Thou art *made a gazing-stock to the world, to angels, and to men.*

As all the world was bound to thee for thy Incarnation and residence upon the face of the earth, so especially Judea, to whose limits thou confinedst thyself; and therein, above all the rest, three cities, Nazareth, Capernaum, Jerusalem, on whom thou bestowedst the most time, and cost of preaching, and miraculous works. Yet in all three thou receivedst not strange entertainment only, but hostile. In Nazareth, they would have cast thee down headlong from the mount: in Capernaum, they would have bound thee: in Jerusalem, they crucified thee at last, and now are amazed at thy presence. Those places and persons that have the greatest helps and privileges afforded to them are not always the most answerable in the return of their thankfulness. Christ's being amongst us doth not make us happy, but his welcome. Every day may we hear him in our streets, and yet be as new to seek as these citizens of Jerusalem; *Who is this?*

Was it a question of applause, or of contempt, or of ignorance? Applause, of his abettors; contempt, of the scribes and Pharisees; ignorance, of the multitude. Surely his abettors had not been moved at this sight; the scribes and Pharisees had rather envied than contemned; the multitude, doubtless, inquired seriously, out of a desire of information. Not that the citizens of Jerusalem knew not Christ, who was so ordinary a guest, so noted a Prophet amongst them. Questionless, this question was asked of that part of the train which went before this triumph, while our Saviour was not yet in sight, which ere long his presence had resolved. It had been their duty to have known, to have attended Christ, yea to have published him to others: since this is not done, it is well yet that they spend their breath in an inquiry. No doubt there were many that would not so much

as leave their shopboard, and step to their doors or their windows, to say, *Who is this?* as not thinking it could concern them who passed by while they might sit still. Those Greeks were in some way to good that could say to Philip, *We would see Jesus.* O Saviour, thou hast been so long amongst us, that it is our just shame if we know thee not. If we have been slack hitherto, let our zealous inquiry make amends for our neglect. Let outward pomp and worldly glory draw the hearts and tongues of carnal men after them; O let it be my care and happiness to ask after nothing but thee.

The attending disciples could not be to seek for an answer. Which of the prophets have not put it into their mouths? *Who is this?* Ask Moses, and he shall tell you, *The seed of the woman* that *shall break the serpent's head:* ask our father Jacob, and he shall tell you, *The Shiloh of the tribe of Judah:* ask David, and he shall tell you, *The King of Glory:* ask Isaiah, he shall tell you, *Immanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace:* ask Jeremiah, and he shall tell you, *The Righteous Branch:* ask Daniel, he shall tell you, *The Messiah:* ask John the Baptist, he shall tell you, *The Lamb of God:* if ye ask the God of the prophets, he hath told you, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Yea, if all these be too good for you to consult with, the devils themselves have been forced to say, *I know who thou art, even that Holy One of God.* On no side hath Christ left himself without a testimony; and accordingly the multitude here have their answer ready, *This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth in Galilee.*

Ye undervalue your Master, O ye well-meaning followers of Christ: *A prophet? yea, more than a prophet?* John Baptist was so, yet was but the harbinger of this Messiah. This was that God by whom the prophets were both sent and inspired. *Of Nazareth,* say you? ye mistake him: Bethlehem was the place of his birth, the proof of his tribe, the evidence of his Messiahship. If Nazareth were honoured by his preaching, there was no reason he should be dishonoured by Nazareth. No doubt, he, whom you confessed, pardoned the error of your confession. Ye spake but according to the common style: the two disciples in their walk to Emmaus, after the death and resurrection of Christ, give him no other title. This belief passed current with the people, and thus high even the vulgar thoughts could then rise; and no doubt even

thus much was for that time very acceptable to the Father of Mercies. If we make profession of the truth according to our knowledge, though there be much imperfection in our apprehension and delivery, the mercy of our good God takes it well, not judging us for what we have not, but accepting us in what we have. Shouldst thou, O God, stand strictly upon the punctual degrees of knowledge, how wide would it go with millions of souls! for, beside much error in many, there is more ignorance. But herein do we justly magnify and adore thy goodness, that where thou findest diligent endeavour of better information matched with an honest simplicity of heart, thou passest by our unwilling defects and crownest our well-meant confessions.

But, O the wonderful hand of God in the carriage of this whole business! The people proclaimed Christ first a king, and now they proclaim him a prophet. Why did not the Roman bands run into arms upon the one? why did not the scribes and Pharisees and the envious priesthood mutiny upon the other? They had made decrees against him, they had laid wait for him, yet now he passes in state through their streets, acclaimed both a king and a prophet without their reluctation. What can we impute this unto, but to the powerful and overruling arm of his Godhead? He that restrained the rage of Herod and his courtiers upon the first news of a King born, now restrains all the opposite powers of Jerusalem from lifting up a finger against this last and public avouchment of the regal and prophetical office of Christ. When flesh and blood have done their worst, they can be but such as he will make them. If the legions of hell combine with the potentates of the earth, they cannot go beyond the reach of their tether: whether they rise or sit still, they shall, by an insensible ordination, perform that will of the Almighty which they least think of and most oppose.

With this humble pomp and just acclamation, O Saviour, dost thou pass through the streets of Jerusalem to the Temple. Thy first walk was not to Herod's palace, or to the market-places or burses of that populous city, but to the Temple, whether it were out of duty or out of need: as a good son, when he comes from far, his first alighting is at his father's house, neither would he think it other than preposterous to visit strangers before his friends, or friends before his father. Besides, that the Temple had more use of thy presence: both there was the most disorder, and from thence, as from a corrupt spring, it issued forth into all the channels of Jerusalem. A wise physician inquires first into the state

of the head, heart, liver, stomach, the vital and chief parts, ere he asks after the petty symptoms of the meaner and less-concerning members. Surely all good or evil begins at the Temple. If God have there his own, if men find there nothing but wholesome instruction, holy example, the commonwealth cannot want some happy tincture of piety, devotion, sanctimony; as that fragrant perfume from Aaron's head sweetens his utmost skirts. Contrarily, the distempers of the Temple cannot but affect the secular state. As therefore the good husbandman, when he sees the leaves grow yellow, and the branches unthriving, looks presently to the root; so didst thou, O holy Saviour, upon sight of the disorders spread over Jerusalem and Judea, address thyself to the rectifying of the Temple.

No sooner is Christ alighted at the gate of the outer court of his Father's house, than he falls to work. Reformation was his errand; that he roundly attempts. That holy ground was profaned by sacrilegious barterings. Within the third court of that sacred place was a public mart held. Here was a throng of buyers and sellers: though not of all commodities, (the Jews were not so irreligious,) only of those things which were for the use of sacrifice. The Israelites came many of them from far: it was no less from Dan to Beersheba than the space of an hundred and threescore miles; neither could it be without much inconvenience for them to bring their bullocks, sheep, goats, lambs, meal, oil, and such other holy provision with them up to Jerusalem. Order was taken by the priests that these might for money be had close by the altar, to the ease of the offerer and the benefit of the seller, and perhaps no disprofit to themselves. The pretence was fair, the practice unsufferable. The great Owner of the Temple comes to vindicate the reputation and rights of his own house; and in an indignation at that so foul abuse lays fiercely about him, and with his three-stringed scourge whips out those sacrilegious chapmen, casts down their tables, throws away their baskets, scatters their heaps, and sends away their customers with smart and horror.

With what fear and astonishment did the repining offenders look upon so unexpected a justicer; while their conscience lashed them more than those cords, and the terror of that meek chastiser more affrighted them than his blows! Is this that mild and gentle Saviour that came to *take upon him our stripes,* and to undergo *the chastisements of our peace?* Is this that quiet *Lamb, which before his shearers openeth not his mouth?* See

now, how his eyes sparkle with holy anger, and dart forth beams of indignation in the faces of these guilty collybists; see how his hands deal strokes and ruin! Yea, thus, thus it became thee, O thou gracious Redeemer of men, to let the world see thou hast not lost thy justice in thy mercy; that there is not more lenity in thy forbearances than rigour in thy just severity; that thou canst thunder as well as shine.

This was not thy first act of this kind. At the entrance of thy public work thou beganst so as thou now shuttest up, with purging thine house. Once before had these offenders been whipt out of that holy place which now they dare again defile. Shame and smart is not enough to reclaim obdured offenders. Gainful sins are not easily checked, but less easily mastered. These bold flies, where they are beaten off, will alight again: *he that is filthy* will *be filthy still.*

Oft yet had our Saviour been, besides this, in the Temple; and often had seen the same disorder: he doth not think fit to be always whipping. It was enough thus twice to admonish and chastise them before their ruin. That God, who hates sin always, will not chide always, and strikes more seldom; but he would have those few strokes perpetual monitors; and if those prevail not, he smites but once. It is his uniform course, first the whip; and if that speed not, then the sword.

There is a reverence due to God's house, for the Owner's sake, for the service's sake. Secular and profane actions are not for that sacred roof; much less, uncivil and beastly. What but holiness can become that place which is *the Beauty of Holiness.*

The fairest pretences cannot bear out a sin with God. Never could there be more plausible colours cast upon any act; the convenience, the necessity of provisions for the sacrifice: yet, through all these, do the fiery eyes of our Saviour see the foul covetousness of the priests, the fraud of the moneychangers, the intolerable abuse of the Temple. Common eyes may be cheated with easy pretexts; but he that looks through the heart at the face justly answers our apologies with scourges.

None but the hand of public authority must reform the abuses of the Temple. If all be out of course there, no man is barred from sorrow: the grief may reach to all; the power of reformation only to those whom it concerneth. It was but a just question, though ill propounded to Moses, *Who made thee a judge or a ruler?* We must all imitate the zeal of our Saviour; we may not

imitate his correction. If we strike uncalled, we are justly stricken for our arrogation, for our presumption. A tumultuary remedy may prove a medicine worse than the disease.

But what shall I say of so sharp and imperious an act from so meek an agent? Why did not the priests and Levites, whose this gain partly was, abet these moneychangers, and make head against Christ? Why did not those multitudes of men stand upon their defence, and wrest that whip out of the hand of a seemingly weak and unarmed Prophet; but, instead thereof, run away like sheep from before him, not daring to abide his presence, though his hand had been still? Surely had these men been so many armies, yea, so many legions of devils, when God will astonish and chase them, they cannot have the power to stand and resist. How easy is it for him that made the heart to put either terror or courage into it at pleasure! O Saviour, it was none of thy least miracles that thou didst thus drive out a world of able offenders, in spite of their gain and stomachful resolutions: their very profit had no power to stay them against thy frowns. *Who hath resisted* thy *will?* Mens' hearts are not their own; they are, they must be such, as their Maker will have them.

THE FIG TREE CURSED.—Matthew xxi.

When, in this state, our Saviour had rode through the streets of Jerusalem, that evening he lodged not there. Whether he would not, that after so public an acclamation of the people he might avoid all suspicion of plots or popularity; (even unjust jealousies must be shunned; neither is there less wisdom in the prevention than in the remedy of evils;) or whether he could not, for want of an invitation. Hosanna was better cheap than an entertainment, and perhaps the envy of so stomached a reformation discouraged his hosts. However, he goes that evening supperless out of Jerusalem. O unthankful citizens! Do ye thus part with your no less meek than glorious King? His title was not more proclaimed in your streets than your own ingratitude. If he have purged the Temple, yet your hearts are foul.

There is no wonder in mens' unworthiness; there is more than wonder in thy mercy, O thou Saviour of men, that wouldst yet return thither, where thou wert so palpably disregarded. If

they gave thee not thy supper, thou givest them their breakfast: if thou mayest not spend the night with them, thou wilt with them spend the day. O love of unthankful souls, not discourageable by the most hateful indignities, by the basest repulses! What burden canst thou shrink under, who canst bear the weight of ingratitude?

Thou that givest food to all things living art thyself hungry. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus kept not so poor an house but that thou mightest have eaten something at Bethany. Whether thine haste outran thine appetite, or whether on purpose thou forbarest repast, to give opportunity to thine ensuing miracle, I neither ask nor resolve. This was not the first time that thou wast hungry. As thou wouldst be a man, so thou wouldst suffer those infirmities that belong to humanity. Thou camest to be our High Priest: it was thy act and intention not only to intercede for thy people, but to transfer unto thyself, as their sins, so their weaknesses and complaints. Thou knowest to pity what thou hast felt. Are we pinched with want? we endure but what thou didst, we have reason to be patient; thou enduredst what we do, we have reason to be thankful.

But what shall we say to this thine early hunger? The morning, as it is privileged from excess, so from need; the stomach is not wont to rise with the body. Surely, as thine occasions were, no season was exempted from thy want. Thou hadst spent the day before in the holy labour of thy reformation: after a supperless departure, thou spentest the night in prayer: no meal refreshed thy toil. What do we think much to forbear a morsel, or to break a sleep for thee, who didst thus neglect thyself for us?

As if meat were no part of thy care, as if any thing would serve to stop the mouth of hunger, thy breakfast is expected from the next tree. A fig tree grew by the way side, full grown, well spread, thick leaved, and such as might promise enough to a remote eye: thither thou camest to seek that which thou foundest not; and not finding what thou soughtest, as displeased with thy disappointment, cursedst that plant which deluded thy hopes. Thy breath instantly blasted that deceitful tree. It did no otherwise than the whole world must needs do, wither and die with thy curse.

O Saviour, I had rather wonder at thine actions than discuss them. If I should say that as man thou either knewest not or

consideredst not of this fruitlessness, it could no way prejudice thy divine omniscience. This infirmity were no worse than thy weariness or hunger. It was no more disparagement to thee to grow in knowledge than in stature; neither was it any more disgrace to thy perfect humanity, that thou as man knewest not all things at once, than that thou wert not in thy childhood at thy full growth. But herein I doubt not to say, it is more likely thou camest purposely to this tree, knowing the barrenness of it answerable to the season, and fore-resolving the event, that thou mightest hence ground the occasion of so instructive a miracle: like as thou knewest Lazarus was dying, was dead, yet wouldst not seem to take notice of his dissolution, that thou mightest the more glorify thy power in his resuscitation. It was thy willing and determined disappointment for a greater purpose.

But why didst thou curse a poor tree for the want of that fruit which the season yielded not? If it pleased thee to call for that which it could not give, the plant was innocent; and if innocent, why cursed? O Saviour, it is fitter for us to adore than to examine. We may be saucy in inquiring after thee, and fond in answering for thee.

If that season were not for a ripe fruit, yet for some fruit it was. Who knows not the nature of the fig tree to be always bearing? That plant, if not altogether barren, yields a continual succession of increase. While one fig is ripe, another is green. The same bough can content both our taste and our hope. This tree was defective in both, yielding nothing but an empty shade to the mis-hoping traveller.

Besides that, I have learned that thou, O Saviour, wert wont not to speak only, but to work parables. And what was this other than a real parable of thine? All this while hadst thou been in the world; thou hadst given many proofs of thy mercy, (the earth was full of thy goodness,) none of thy judgments: now, immediately before thy Passion, thou thoughtest fit to give this double demonstration of thy just austerity. How else should the world have seen thou canst be severe as well as meek and merciful?

And why mightest not thou, who madest all things, take liberty to destroy a plant for thine own glory? Wherefore serve thy best creatures, but for the praise of thy mercy and justice? What great matter was it, if thou, who once saidst, *Let the earth bring forth the herb yielding seed, and the tree yielding the*

fruit of its own kind, shouldst now say, *Let this fruitless tree wither?*

All this yet was done in figure. In this act of thine I see both an emblem and a prophecy. How didst thou herein mean to teach thy disciples how much thou hatest an unfruitful profession, and what judgments thou meantest to bring upon that barren generation! Once before hadst thou compared the Jewish nation to a fig tree in the midst of thy vineyard, which, after three years' expectation and culture, yielding no fruit, was by thee, the Owner, doomed to a speedy excision: now thou actest what thou then saidst. No tree abounds more with leaf and shade: no nation abounded more with ceremonial observations and semblances of piety. Outward profession, where there is want of inward truth and real practice, doth but help to draw on and aggravate judgment. Had this fig tree been utterly bare and leafless, it had perhaps escaped the curse. Hear this ye vain hypocrites, that care only to show well, never caring for the sincere truth of a conscionable obedience: your fair outside shall be sure to help you to a curse.

That which was the fault of this tree is the punishment of it, *fruitlessness: Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.* Had the boughs been appointed to be torn down, and the body split in pieces, the doom had been more easy, and that juicy plant might yet have recovered, and have lived to recompense this deficiency: now it shall be what it was, *fruitless.* Woe be to that church or soul that is punished with her own sin. Outward plagues are but favour in comparison of spiritual judgments.

That curse might well have stood with a long continuance; the tree might have lived long, though fruitless; but no sooner is the word passed, than the leaves flag and turn yellow, the branches wrinkle and shrink, the bark discolours, the root dries, the plant withers. O God, what creature is able to abide the blasting of the breath of thy displeasure? Even the most great and glorious angels of heaven could not stand one moment before thine anger, but perished under thy wrath everlastingly. How irresistible is thy power! how dreadful are thy judgments! Lord, chastise my fruitlessness, but punish it not; at least, punish it, but curse it not, lest I wither and be consumed.

CHRIST BETRAYED.

Matthew xxvi; Mark xiv; Luke xxii; John xviii.

Such an eyesore was Christ that raised Lazarus, and Lazarus whom Christ raised, to the envious priests, scribes, elders of the Jews, that they consult to murder both. While either of them lives, neither can the glory of that miracle die nor the shame of the oppugners.

Those malicious heads are laid together in the parlour of Caiaphas. Happy had it been for them, if they had spent but half those thoughts upon their own salvation which they misemployed upon the destruction of the innocent. At last, this results, that force is not their way; subtlety and treachery must do that which should be vainly attempted by power.

Who is so fit to work this feat against Christ as one of his own? There can be no treason where is not some trust. Who so fit among the domestics as he that bare the bag, and overloved that which he bare? That heart, which hath once enslaved itself to red and white earth, may be made any thing. Who can trust to the power of good means, when Judas, who heard Christ daily, whom others heard to preach Christ daily, who daily saw Christ's miracles, and daily wrought miracles in Christ's name, is at his best a thief, and ere long a traitor? That crafty and malignant spirit which presided in that bloody council hath easily found out a fit instrument for his hellish plot. As God knows, so Satan guesses, who are his, and will be sure to make use of his own. If Judas were Christ's domestic, yet he was mammon's servant: he could not but hate that Master whom he formally professed to serve, while he really served that master which Christ professed to hate. He is but in his trade while he is bartering even for his Master; *What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?* Saidst thou not well, O Saviour, *I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* Thou that knewest to distinguish betwixt men and spirits callest Judas by his right name. Lo, he is become a tempter to the worst of evils.

Wretched Judas! whether shall I more abhor thy treachery or wonder at thy folly? What will they, what can they give thee, valuable to that head which thou profferest to sale? Were they able to pay, or thou capable to receive, all those precious metals that are laid up in the secret cabins of the whole earth, how were

this price equivalent to the worth of him that made them? Had they been able to have fetched down those rich and glittering spangles of heaven, and to have put them into thy fist, what had this been to weigh with a God? How basely therefore dost thou speak of chaffering for him whose the world was! *What will ye give me?* Alas! what were they? what had they, miserable men, to pay for such a purchase? The time was, when he that set thee on work could say, *All the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them are mine, and I give them to whom I please: all these will I give thee.* Had he now made that offer to thee in this woful bargain, it might have carried some colour of a temptation; and even thus it had been a match ill made. But for thee to tender a trade of so invaluable a commodity to these pelting [qu. pedling] petty chapmen for thirty poor silverlings, it was no less base than wicked.

How unequal is this rate! Thou that valuedst Mary's ointment which she bestowed upon the feet of Christ at three hundred pieces of silver, sellest thy Master, on whom that precious odour was spent, at thirty. Worldly hearts are pennywise and pound-foolish; they know how to set high prices upon the worthless trash of this world, but for heavenly things, or the God that owns them, these they shamefully undervalue.

And I will deliver him unto you. False and presumptuous Judas! it was more than thou couldst do. Thy price was not more too low than thy undertaking was too high. Had all the powers of hell combined with thee, they could not have delivered thy Master into the hands of men. The act was none but his own. All that he did, all that he suffered, was perfectly voluntary. Had he pleased to resist, how easily had he with one breath blown thee and thy complices down into their hell! It is no thank to thee that he would be delivered. O Saviour, all our safety, all our comfort, depends not so much upon thine act as upon thy will: in vain should we have hoped for the benefit of a forced redemption.

The bargain is driven, the price paid. Judas returns; and looks no less smoothly upon his Master and his fellows than as if he had done no disservice. What cares he? His heart tells him he is rich, though it tell him he is false. He was not now first a hypocrite.

The Passover is at hand: no man is so busy to prepare for it, or more devoutly forward to receive it, than Judas.

O the sottishness and obduredness of this son of perdition! How many proofs had he formerly of his Master's omniscience! There was no day wherein he saw not that thoughts and things absent came familiar under his cognizance; yet this miscreant dares plot a secret villainy against his person, and face it. If he cannot be honest, yet he will be close.

That he may be notoriously impudent, he shall know he is descried: while he thinks fit to conceal his treachery, our Saviour thinks not fit to conceal the knowledge of that treacherous conspiracy; *Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.* Who would not think but that discovered wickedness should be ashamed of itself? Did not Judas, think we, blush and grow pale again, and cast down his guilty eyes, and turn away his troubled countenance, at so galling an intimation? Custom of sin steels the brow, and makes it incapable of any relenting impressions.

Could the other disciples have discerned any change in any one of their faces, they had not been so sorrowfully affected with the charge. Methinks I see how intentively they bent their eyes upon each other, as if they would have looked through those windows down into the bosom; with what self-confidence, with what mutual jealousy, they perused each other's foreheads; and now, as rather thinking fit to distrust their own innocence than their Master's assertion, each trembles to say, *Lord, is it I?* It is possible there may lurk secret wickedness in some blind corner of the heart which we know not of: it is possible that time and temptation, working upon our corruption, may at last draw us into some such sin as we could not forebelieve. Whither may we not fall, if we be left to our own strength? It is both wise and holy to misdoubt the worst: *Lord, is it I?*

In the mean time, how fair hath Judas all this while carried with his fellows! Had his former life bewrayed any falsehood or misdemeanour, they had soon found where to pitch their just suspicion: now Judas goes for so honest a man, that every disciple is rather ready to suspect himself than him. It is true, he was a thief; but who knows that besides his Maker? The outsides of men are no less deceitful than their hearts. It is not more unsafe to judge by outward appearances, than it is uncharitable not to judge so.

O the headstrong resolutions of wickedness, not to be checked by any opposition! Who would not but have thought, if the notice of an intended evil could not have prevented it, yet that the

threats of judgment should have affrighted the boldest offender? Judas can sit by, and hear his Master say, *Woe be to the man by whom the Son of man is betrayed; it had been better for that man never to have been born*, and is no more blanked than very innocence, but thinks, "What care I? I have the money; I shall escape the shame: the fact shall be close, the match gainful: it will be long ere I get so much by my service; if I fare well for the present, I shall shift well enough for the future." Thus secretly he claps up another bargain: he *makes a covenant with death, and with hell an agreement.* O Judas, didst thou ever hear aught but truth fall from the mouth of that thy Divine Master? Canst thou distrust the certainty of that dreadful menace of vengeance? How then durst thou persist in the purpose of so flagitious and damnable a villany? Resolved sinners run on desperately in their wicked courses, and have so bent their eyes upon the profit or pleasure of their mischievous projects, that they will not see hell lie open before them in the way.

As if that shameless man meant to outbrave all accusations, and to outface his own heart, he dares ask too, *Master, is it I?* No disciple shall more zealously abominate that crime than he that fosters it in his bosom. Whatever the Searcher of hearts knows by him is locked up in his own breast: to be perfidious is nothing, so he may be secret: his Master knows him for a traitor; it is not long that he shall live to complain; his fellows think him honest; all is well while he is esteemed. Reputation is the only care of false hearts; not truth of being, not conscience of merit: so they may seem fair to men, they care not how foul they are to God.

Had our Saviour only had this knowledge at the second hand, this boldness had been enough to make him suspect the credit of the best intelligence. Who could imagine that a guilty man dared thus browbeat a just accusation? Now, he whose piercing and unfailing eyes see things as they are, not as they seem, can peremptorily convince the impudence of this hollow questionest with a direct affirmation; *Thou hast said.*

Foolish traitor! couldst thou think that those blear eyes of thine would endure the beams of the sun, or that counterfeit slip the fire? Was it not sufficient for thee to be secretly vicious, but thou must presume to contest with an omniscient Accuser? Hast thou yet enough? Thou supposedst thy crime unknown. To men it was so; had thy Master been no more, it had been so to him: now his knowledge argues him Divine. How durst thou

yet resolve to lift up thy hand against him who knows thine offence, and can either prevent or revenge it?

As yet the charge was private, either not heard or not observed by thy fellows; it shall be at first whispered to one, and at last known to all. Bashful and penitent sinners are fit to be concealed; shame is meet for those that have none.

Curiosity of knowledge is an old disease of human nature: besides, Peter's zeal would not let him dwell under the danger of so doubtful a crimination; he cannot but sit on thorns till he know the man. His signs ask what his voice dare not.

What law requires all followers to be equally beloved? Why may not our favours be freely dispensed where we like best, without envy, without prejudice? None of Christ's train could complain of neglect; John is highest in grace. Blood, affection, zeal, diligence have endeared him above his fellows.

He that is dearest in respect is next in place: in that form of side-sitting at the table, he leaned on the bosom of Jesus.

Where is more love, there may be more boldness. This secrecy and entireness privileges John to ask that safely which Peter might not without much inconvenience and peril of a check. The beloved disciple well understands this silent language, and dares put Peter's thought into words. Love shutteth out fear. O Saviour, the confidence of thy goodness emboldens us not to shrink at any suit. Thy love shed abroad in our hearts bids us ask that which in a stranger were no better than presumption.

Once, when Peter asked thee a question concerning John, *What shall this man do?* he received a short answer, *What is that to thee?* Now, when John asks thee a question no less seemingly curious, at Peter's instance, *Who is it that betrays thee?* however thou mightest have returned him the same answer, since neither of their persons was any more concerned, yet thou condescendest to a mild and full, though secret satisfaction. There was not so much difference in the men, as in the matter of the demand. No occasion was given to Peter of moving that question concerning John: the indefinite assertion of treason amongst the disciples was a most just occasion of moving John's question for Peter and himself.

That which therefore was timorously demanded is answered graciously: *He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it. And he gave the sop to Judas.* How loath was our Saviour to name him whom he was not unwilling to design! All

is here expressed by dumb signs. The hand speaks what the tongue would not. In the same language wherein Peter asked the question of John doth our Saviour shape an answer to John: what a beck demanded is answered by a sop.

O Saviour, I do not hear thee say, "Look on whomsoever I frown, or to whomsoever I do a public affront; that is the man;" but, *To whomsoever I shall give a sop.* Surely a bystander would have thought this man deep in thy books, and would have construed this act as they did thy tears for Lazarus, *See how he loves him.* To carve a man out of thine own dish, what could it seem to argue but a singularity of respect? Yet, lo, there is but one whom thou hatest, one only traitor at thy board, and thou givest him a sop. The outward gifts of God are not always the proofs of his love; yea, sometimes are bestowed in displeasure. Had not he been a wise disciple that should have envied the great favour done to Judas, and have stomached his own preterition? So foolish are they, who, measuring God's affection by temporal benefits, are ready to applaud prospering wickedness, and to grudge outward blessings to them which are uncapable of any better.

After the sop, Satan entered into Judas. Better had it been for that treacherous disciple to have wanted that morsel; not that there was any malignity in the bread, or that the sop had any power to convey Satan into the receiver, or that by a necessary concomitance that evil spirit was in or with it. Favours ill used make the heart more capable of further evil. That wicked spirit commonly takes occasion by any of God's gifts to assault us the more eagerly. After our sacramental morsel, if we be not the better, we are sure the worse. I dare not say, yet I dare think, that Judas, comparing his Master's words and John's whisperings with the tender of this sop, and finding himself thus denoted, was now so much the more irritated to perform what he had wickedly purposed. Thus Satan took advantage by the sop of a further possession. Twice before had that evil spirit made a palpable entry into that lewd heart: first, in his covetousness and theft; those sinful habits could not be without that author of ill: then, in his damnable resolution and plot of so heinous a conspiracy against Christ. Yet now, as if it were new to begin, *after the sop Satan entered.* As in every gross sin which we entertain we give harbour to that evil spirit, so in every degree of growth in wickedness new hold is taken by him of the heart. No sooner is the foot over the threshold than we enter into the house: when we

pass thence into the inner rooms, we make still but a perfect entrance. At first Satan entered, to make the house of Judas's heart his own; now he enters into it as his own. The first purpose of sin opens the gates to Satan; consent admits him into the entry, full resolution of sin gives up the keys to his hands, and puts him into absolute possession.

What a plain difference there is betwixt the regenerate and evil heart! Satan lays siege to the best by his temptations, and sometimes, upon battery and breach made, enters: the other admits him by willing composition. When he is entered upon the regenerate, he is entertained with perpetual skirmishes, and by an holy violence at last repulsed: in the other, he is plausibly received, and freely commandeth.

O the admirable meekness of this Lamb of God! I see not a frown, I hear not a check; but, *What thou doest, do quickly.* Why do we startle at our petty wrongs, and swell with anger, and break into furious revenges upon every occasion when the Pattern of our patience lets not fall one harsh word upon so foul and bloody a traitor? Yea, so fairly is this carried, that the disciples as yet can apprehend no change; they innocently think of commodities to be bought; when Christ speaks of their Master sold, and, as one that longs to be out of pain, hastens the pace of his irreclaimable conspirator, *That thou doest, do quickly.* It is one thing to say, "Do what thou intendest," and another to say, *Do quickly what thou doest.* There was villany in the deed, the speed had no sin. The time was harmless, while the man and the act was wicked. O Judas, how happy had it been for thee, if thou hadst never done what thou perfidiously intendedst! but since thou wilt needs do it, delay is but a torment.

That steely heart yet relents not. The obfirmed traitor knows his way to the high priest's hall, and to the garden. The watchword is already given, *Hail, Master,* and *a kiss.* Yet more hypocrisy? yet more presumption upon so overstrained a lenity? How knewest thou, O thou false traitor, whether that sacred cheek would suffer itself to be defiled with thine impure touch! Thou well foundst thy treachery was unmasked. Thy heart could not be so false to thee as not to tell thee how hateful thou wert. Go, kiss and adore those silverlings which thou art too sure of! the Master whom thou hast sold is not thine.

But O the impudence of a deplored sinner! That tongue which had agreed to sell his Master dares say, *Hail;* and those lips that

have passed the compact of his death dare offer to kiss him whom they had covenanted to kill. It was God's charge of old, *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.* O Saviour, thou hadst reason to be angry with this kiss; the scourges, the thorns, the nails, the spear of thy murderers were not so painful, so piercing, as this touch of Judas: all these were in this one alone. The stabs of an enemy cannot be so grievous as the skin-deep wounds of a disciple.

THE AGONY.—Matthew xxvi; Mark xiv; Luke xxii.

What a preface do I find to my Saviour's passion! an hymn, and an agony: a cheerful hymn, and an agony no less sorrowful. An hymn begins both to raise and testify the courageous resolutions of his suffering; an agony follows, to show that he was truly sensible of those extremities wherewith he was resolved to grapple.

All the disciples bore their part in that hymn; it was fit they should all see his comfortable and divine magnanimity wherewith he entered into those sad lists: only three of them shall be allowed to be witnesses of his agony; only those three that had been the witnesses of his glorious transfiguration. That sight had well forearmed and prepared them for this: how could they be dismayed to see his trouble, who there saw his Majesty? how could they be dismayed to see his body now sweat which they had then seen to shine? how could they be daunted to see him now accosted with Judas and his train, whom they then saw attended with Moses and Elias? how could they be discouraged to hear the reproaches of base men, when they had heard the voice of God to him from that excellent glory, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?*

Now before these eyes this sun begins to be overcast with clouds; *He began to be sorrowful, and very heavy.* Many sad thoughts for mankind had he secretly hatched, and yet smothered in his own breast; now his grief is too great to keep in: *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.* O Saviour, what must thou needs feel when thou saidst so? Feeble minds are apt to bemoan themselves upon light occasions: the grief must needs be violent that causeth a strong heart to break forth into a passionate complaint. Woe is me! what a word is this for the Son of God! Where is that Comforter which thou promisedst to send to

others? Where is that thy *Father of all mercies, and God of all comfort, in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore?* Where are those constant and cheerful resolutions of a fearless walking through the valley of the shadow of death? Alas! if that face were not hid from thee whose essence could not be disunited, these pangs could not have been. The sun was withdrawn a while, that there might be a cool, though not a dark night, as in the world, so in thy breast; withdrawn in respect of sight, not of being. It was the hardest piece of thy sufferings that thou must be disconsolate.

But to whom dost thou make this moan, O thou Saviour of men? Hard is that man driven that is fain to complain to his inferiors. Had Peter or James or John thus bewailed himself to thee, there had been ease to their soul in venting itself; thou hadst been both apt to pity them, and able to relieve them: but now, in that thou lamentest thy case to them, alas! what issue couldst thou expect? They might be astonished with thy grief; but there is neither power in their hands to free thee from those sorrows, nor power in their compassion to mitigate them. Nay, in this condition what could all the angels of heaven, as of themselves, do to succour thee? What strength could they have but from thee? What creature can help when thou complainest? It must be only the stronger that can aid the weak.

Old and holy Simeon could foresay to thy blessed mother, that *a sword should pierce through her soul;* but, alas, how many swords at once pierce thine! Every one of these swords is both sharp and edged; *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.* What human soul is capable of the conceit of the least of those sorrows that oppressed thine? It was not thy body that suffered now: the pain of body is but as the body of pain; the anguish of the soul is as the soul of anguish. That and in that thou sufferedst; where are they that dare so far disparage thy sorrow as to say thy soul suffered only in sympathy with thy body; not immediately, but by participation; not in itself, but in its partner? Thou best knewest what thou feltest; and thou that feltest thine own pain canst cry out of thy soul. Neither didst thou say, "My soul is troubled;" so it often was, even to tears: but, *My soul is sorrowful;* as if it had been before assaulted, now possessed of grief. Nor yet this in any tolerable moderation; changes of passion are incident to every human soul: but *exceeding sorrowful.* Yet there are degrees in the very extremities of

evils: those that are most vehement may yet be capable of a remedy, at least a relaxation; thine was past these hopes, *exceeding sorrowful unto death.*

What was it, what could it be, O Saviour, that lay thus heavy upon thy Divine soul? Was it the fear of death? Was it the forefelt pain, shame, torment of thine ensuing crucifixion? O poor and base thoughts of the narrow hearts of cowardly and impotent mortality! How many thousands of thy blessed martyrs have welcomed no less tortures with smiles and gratulations; and have made a sport of those exquisite cruelties which their very tyrants thought unsufferable! Whence had they this strength but from thee? If their weakness were thus undaunted and prevalent, what was thy power? No, no: it was the sad weight of the sin of mankind; it was the heavy burden of thy Father's wrath for our sin that thus pressed thy soul, and wrung from thee these bitter expressions.

What can it avail thee, O Saviour, to tell thy grief to men? Who can ease thee but He of whom thou saidst, *My Father is greater than I?* Lo, to him thou turnest; *O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*

Was not this that *prayer,* O dear Christ, which *in the days of thy flesh thou offeredst up with strong crying and tears to him that was able to save thee from death?* Surely this was it. Never was cry so strong, never was God thus solicited. How could heaven choose but shake at such a prayer from the power that made it? How can my heart but tremble to hear this suit from *the Captain of our salvation?* O thou that saidst, *I and my Father are one,* dost thou suffer aught from thy Father but what thou wouldst, what thou determinedst? Was this cup of thine either casual or forced? Wouldst thou wish for what thou knewest thou wouldst not have possible? Far, far be these misraised thoughts of our ignorance and frailty. Thou camest to suffer, and thou wouldst do what thou camest for; yet since thou wouldst be a man, thou wouldst take all of man save sin: it is but human, and not sinful, to be loath to suffer what we may avoid. In this velleity of thine thou wouldst show what that nature of ours which thou hadst assumed could incline to wish; but in thy resolution thou wouldst show us what thy victorious thoughts, raised and assisted by thy Divine power, had determinately pitched upon; *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* As man, thou hadst a will of thine own: no human soul can be perfect without that main

faculty. That will which naturally could be content to incline towards an exemption from miseries gladly vails to that Divine will whereby thou art designed to *the chastisements of our peace.* Those pains, which in themselves were grievous, thou embracest as decreed; so as thy fear hath given place to thy love and obedience. How should we have known these evils so formidable if thou hadst not in half a thought inclined to deprecate them? How could we have avoided so formidable and deadly evils, if thou hadst not willingly undergone them? We acknowledge thine holy fear; we adore thy Divine fortitude.

While thy mind was in this fearful agitation, it is no marvel if thy feet were not fixed. Thy place is more changed than thy thoughts. One while thou walkest to thy drowsy attendants and stirrest up their needful vigilancy: then thou returnest to thy passionate devotions, thou fallest again upon thy face.

If thy body be humbled down to the earth, thy soul is yet lower: thy prayers are so much more vehement as thy pangs are; *And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

O my Saviour, what an agony am I in while I think of thine! What pain, what fear, what strife, what horror was in thy sacred breast! How didst thou struggle under the weight of our sins that thou thus sweatest, that thou thus bleedest! All was peace with thee: thou wert one with thy coeternal and coessential Father; all the angels worshipped thee; all the powers of heaven and earth awfully acknowledged thine infiniteness. It was our person that feoffed thee in this misery and torment: in that thou sustainedst thy Father's wrath and our curse. If eternal death be unsufferable, if every sin deserve eternal death, what, O what was it for thy soul, in this short time of thy bitter passion, to answer those millions of eternal deaths which all the sins of all mankind had deserved from the just hand of thy Godhead? I marvel not if thou bleedest a sweat, if thou sweatest blood. If the moisture of that sweat be from the body, the tincture of it is from the soul. As there never was such another sweat, so neither can there be ever such a suffering. It is no wonder if the sweat were more than natural, when the suffering was more than human. O Saviour, so willing was that precious blood of thine to be let forth for us, that it was ready to prevent thy persecutors; and issued forth in those pores before thy wounds were opened by thy tor-

mentors. O that my heart could bleed unto thee with true inward compunction for those sins of mine which are guilty of this thine agony; and have drawn blood of thee, both in the garden and on the cross! Woe is me! I had been in hell, if thou hadst not been in thine agony; I had scorched, if thou hadst not sweat. O let me abhor my own wickedness, and admire and bless thy mercy.

But, O ye blessed spirits, which came to comfort my conflicted Saviour, how did ye look upon the Son of God when ye saw him labouring for life under these violent temptations! With what astonishment did ye behold him bleeding whom ye adored! In the wilderness, after his duel with Satan, ye came and ministered unto him; and now in the garden, while he is in a harder combat, ye appear to strengthen him. O the wise and marvellous dispensation of the Almighty! Whom God will afflict, an angel shall relieve; the Son shall suffer, the servant shall comfort him; the God of angels droopeth, the angel of God strengthens him.

Blessed Jesu, if as man thou wouldst be *made a little lower than the angels*, how can it disparage thee to be attended and cheered up by an angel? Thine humiliation would not disdain comfort from meaner hands. How free was it for thy Father to convey seasonable consolations to thine humbled soul by whatsoever means! Behold, though thy cup shall not pass, yet it shall be sweetened. What if thou see not, for the time, thy Father's face? yet thou shalt feel his hand. What could that spirit have done without the God of spirits? O Father of mercies, thou mayest bring thine into agonies, but thou wilt never leave them there. *In the midst of the sorrows of my heart thy comforts shall refresh my soul.* Whatsoever be the means of my supportation, I know and adore the Author.

PETER AND MALCHUS; OR, CHRIST APPREHENDED.—John xviii.

Wherefore, O Saviour, didst thou take those three choice disciples with thee from their fellows, but that thou expectedst some comfort from their presence? A seasonable word may sometimes fall from the meanest attendant; and the very society of those we trust carries in it some kind of contentment.

Alas! what broken reeds are men! While thou art sweating in thine agony, they are snorting securely. Admonitions, threats,

entreaties cannot keep their eyes open. Thou tellest them of danger, they will needs dream of ease; and though twice roused, as if they had purposed this neglect, they carelessly sleep out thy sorrow and their own peril. What help hast thou of such followers? In the mount of thy transfiguration they slept; and, besides, fell on their faces when they should behold thy glory, and were not themselves for fear: in the garden of thine agony they fell upon the ground for drowsiness, when they should compassionate thy sorrow, and lost themselves in a stupid sleepiness.

Doubtless, even this disregard made thy prayers so much more fervent: the less comfort we find on earth, the more we seek above. Neither soughtest thou more than thou foundest: lo, thou *wert heard in that which thou fearedst.* An angel supplies men: that spirit was vigilant, while thy disciples were heavy. The exchange was happy.

No sooner is this good angel vanished than that domestic devil appears; Judas comes up, and shows himself in the head of those miscreant troops. He, whose too much honour it had been to be a follower of so blessed a Master, affects now to be the leader of this wicked rabble. The sheep's fleece is now cast off; the wolf appears in his own likeness.

He that would be false to his Master would be true to his chapmen: even evil spirits keep touch with themselves.

The bold traitor dare yet still mix hypocrisy with villany: his very salutations and kisses murder. O Saviour, this is no news to thee: all those who under a show of godliness practise impiety do still betray thee thus.

Thou who hadst said, *One of you is a devil,* didst not now say, "Avoid, Satan;" but, *Friend, wherefore art thou come?* As yet, Judas, it was not too late. Had there been any the least spark of grace yet remaining in that perfidious bosom, this word had fetched thee upon thy knees. All this sunshine cannot thaw an obdurate heart.

The sign is given; Jesus is taken. Wretched traitor! why wouldst thou for this purpose be thus attended? And, ye foolish priests and elders! why sent you such a band, and so armed, for this apprehension? One messenger had been enough for a voluntary prisoner. Had my Saviour been unwilling to be taken, all your forces, with all the legions of hell to help them, had been too little: since he was willing to be attached, two were too many. When he did but say, *I am he,* that easy breath alone routed all

your troops, and cast them to the earth whom it might as easily have cast down into hell. What if he had said, "I will not be taken?" where had ye been? or what could your swords and staves have done against Omnipotence?

Those disciples that failed of their vigilance failed not of their courage. They had heard their Master speak of providing swords, and now they thought it was time to use them: *Shall we smite?* They were willing to fight for him with whom they were not careful to watch. But, of all other, Peter was most forward: instead of opening his lips, he unsheaths his sword; and instead of "Shall I?" smites. He had noted Malchus, a busy servant of the high priest, too ready to second Judas, and to lay his rude hands upon the Lord of life: against this man, his heart rises, and his hand is lift up. That ear, which had too officiously listened to the unjust and cruel charge of his wicked master, is now severed from that worse head which it had misserved.

I love and honour thy zeal, O blessed disciple: thou couldst not brook wrong done to thy Divine Master. Had thy life been dearer to thee than his safety, thou hadst not drawn thy sword upon a whole troop. It was in earnest that thou saidst, *Though all men, yet not I;* and, *Though I should die with thee, yet I will not deny thee.* Lo, thou art ready to die upon him that should touch that sacred Person: what would thy life now have been, in comparison of renouncing him?

Since thou wert so fervent, why didst thou not rather fall upon that treacher that betrayed him than that sergeant that arrested him? Surely, the sin was so much greater, as the plot of mischief is more than the execution; as a domestic is nearer than a stranger; as the treason of a friend is worse than the forced enmity of an hireling. Was it that the guilty wretch upon the fact done subduced himself, and shrouded his false head under the wings of darkness? was it that thou couldst not so suddenly apprehend the odious depth of that villany, and instantly hate him that had been thy old companion? was it that thy amazedness as yet conceived not the purposed issue of this seizure, and astonishedly waited for the success? was it that though Judas were more faulty, yet Malchus was more imperiously cruel?

Howsoever, thy courage was awaked with thyself; and thy heart was no less sincere than thine hand was rash. *Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.* Good intentions are no warrant for our

actions. O Saviour, thou canst at once accept of our meanings and censure our deeds. Could there be an affection more worth encouragement than the love to such a Master? could there be a more just cause wherein to draw his sword than in thy quarrel? Yet this love, this quarrel cannot shield Peter from thy check: thy meek tongue smites him gently who had furiously smote thine enemy; *Put up thy sword.*

It was Peter's sword; but to put up, not to use: there is a sword which Peter may use; but it is of another metal. Our weapons are, as our warfare, spiritual: if he smite not with this, he incurs no less blame than for smiting with the other. As for this material sword, what should he do with it that is not allowed to strike? When the Prince of peace bade his followers sell their coat and buy a sword, he meant to insinuate the need of these arms, not their improvement; and to teach them the danger of the time, not the manner of the repulse of danger. When they therefore said, *Behold, here are two swords;* he answered, *It is enough:* he said not, "Go buy more." More had not been enow, if a bodily defence had been intended. David's tower had been too strait to yield sufficient furniture of this kind. When it comes to use, Peter's one sword is too much: *Put up thy sword.* Indeed, there is a temporal sword; and that sword must be drawn, else wherefore is it? but drawn by him that bears it; and he bears it that is ordained to be an avenger, to *execute wrath upon him that doth evil; for he bears not the sword in vain.* If another man draw it, it cuts his fingers; and draws so much blood of him that unwarrantably wields it, as that *he who takes the sword shall perish with the sword.*

Can I choose but wonder how Peter could thus strike unwounded? how he, whose first blow made the fray, could escape hewing in pieces from that band of ruffians? This could not have been, if thy power, O Saviour, had not restrained their rage; if thy seasonable and sharp reproof had not prevented their revenge.

Now, for aught I see, Peter smarts no less than Malchus: neither is Peter's ear less smitten by the mild tongue of his Master than Malchus's ear by the hand of Peter. "Weak disciple! thou *hast zeal, but not according to knowledge:* there is not more danger in this act of thine than inconsideration and ignorance. *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* Thou drawest thy sword to rescue me from suffer-

ing. Alas! if I suffer not, what would become of thee? what would become of mankind? where were that eternal and just decree of my Father, wherein I am a *Lamb slain from the beginning of the world?* Dost thou go about to hinder thine own and the whole world's redemption? Did I not once before call thee Satan for suggesting to me this immunity from my Passion? and dost thou now think to favour me with a real opposition to this great and necessary work? Canst thou be so weak as to imagine, that this suffering of mine is not free and voluntary? Canst thou be so injurious to me as to think I yield because I want aid to resist? Have I not given to thee and to the world many undeniable proofs of my omnipotence? Didst thou not see how easy it had been for me to have blown away these poor forces of my adversaries? Dost thou not know, that if I would require it, all the glorious troops of the angels of heaven, any one whereof is more than worlds of men, would presently show themselves ready to attend and rescue me? *Might* this have stood with the justice of my decree, with the glory of my mercy, with the benefit of man's redemption, it had been done; my power should have triumphed over the impotent malice of my enemies: but now, since that eternal decree must be accomplished, my mercy must be approved, mankind must be ransomed; and this cannot be done without my suffering. Thy well-meant valour is no better than a wrong to thyself, to the world, to me, to my Father."

O gracious Saviour, while thou thus smitest thy disciple, thou healest him whom thy disciple smote. Many greater miracles hadst thou done; none that bewrayed more mercy and meekness than this last cure: of all other, this ear of Malchus hath the loudest tongue to blazon the praise of thy clemency and goodness to thy very enemies. Wherefore came that man but in a hostile manner to attach thee? besides his own, what favour was he worthy of for his master's sake? and if he had not been more forward than his fellows, why had not his skin been as whole as theirs? Yet, even amidst the throng of thine apprehenders, in the heat of their violence, in the height of their malice, and thine own instant peril of death, thou healest that unnecessary ear, which had been guilty of hearing blasphemies against thee, and receiving cruel and unjust charges concerning thee.

O Malchus, could thy ear be whole, and not thy heart broken and contrite with remorse for rising up against so merciful and

so powerful an hand? Couldst thou choose but say, "O blessed Jesu, I see it was thy providence that preserved my head when my ear was smitten; it is thine almighty power that hath miraculously restored that ear of mine which I had justly forfeited: this head of mine shall never be guilty of plotting any further mischief against thee; this ear shall never entertain any more reproaches of thy name; this heart of mine shall ever acknowledge and magnify thy tender mercies, thy divine omnipotence?" Could thy fellows see such a demonstration of power and goodness with unrelenting hearts? Unthankful Malchus and cruel soldiers! ye were worse wounded, and felt it not. God had struck your breasts with a fearful obduration, that ye still persist in your bloody enterprise: *And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away*, &c.

CHRIST BEFORE CAIAPHAS.—Matthew xxvi.

That traitor, whom his own cord made soon after too fast, gave this charge concerning Jesus, *Hold him fast.* Fear makes his guard cruel: they bind his hands, and think no twist can be strong enough for this Samson. Fond Jews and soldiers! if his own will had not tied him faster than your cords, though those manacles had been the stiffest cables or the strongest iron, they had been but threads of tow.

What eyes can but run over to see those hands, that made heaven and earth, wrung together and bruised with those merciless cords; to see Him bound who came to restore us to the liberty of the sons of God; to see the Lord of life contemptuously dragged through the streets, first to the house of Annas, then from thence to the house of Caiaphas, from him to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod back again to Pilate, from Pilate to his Calvary: while, in the mean time, the base rabble and scum of the incensed multitude runs after him with shouts and scorns? The act of death hath not in it so much misery and horror as the pomp of death.

And what needed all this pageant of cruelty? Wherefore was this state and lingering of an unjust execution? was it, for that their malice held a quick despatch too much mercy? was it, for that, while they meant to be bloody, they would fain seem just? A sudden violence had been palpably murderous: now, the colour

of a legal process gilds over all their deadly spite, and would seem to render them honest and the accused guilty.

This attachment, this convention of the innocent, was a true night-work; a deed of so much darkness was not for the light. Old Annas and that wicked bench of grey-headed scribes and elders can be content to break their sleep to do mischief. Envy and malice can make noon of midnight.

It is resolved he shall die; and now pretences must be sought that he may be cleanly murdered.

All evil begins at the sanctuary. The priests and scribes and elders are the first in this bloody scene. They have paid for this head, and now long to see what they shall have for their thirty silverlings.

The bench is set in the hall of Caiaphas. False witnesses are sought for and hired; they agree not, but shame their suborners. Woe is me, what safety can there be for innocence when the evidence is wilfully corrupted? What state was ever so pure as not to yield some miscreants that will either sell or lend an oath? What a brand hath the wisdom of God set upon falsehood, even dissonance and distraction! whereas truth ever holds together, and jars not while it is itself. O Saviour, what a perfect innocence was in thy life, what an exact purity in thy doctrine, that malice itself cannot so much as devise what to slander!

It were hard if hell should not find some factors upon earth. At last, two witnesses are brought in, that have learned to agree with themselves while they differed from truth. They say the same, though false; *This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and build it again in three days.* Perjured wretches! Were these the terms that you heard from that sacred mouth? Said he formally thus as ye have deposed? It is true, he spake of a temple, of destroying, of building, of three days; but did he speak of that temple, of his own destroying, of a material building in that space? He said, *Destroy ye:* ye say, *I am able to destroy.* He said, *this temple* of his body: ye say, *the temple of God.* He said, *I will make up this temple* of my body *in three days:* ye say, *I am able in three days to build this* material *temple of God.* The words were his, the sentence yours: the words were true, the evidence false. So, while you report the words and misreport the sense, ye swear a true falsehood, and are truly forsworn.

Where the resolutions are fixed, any colour will serve. Had

those words been spoken, they contained no crime; had he been such as they supposed him, a mere man, the speech had carried a semblance of ostentation, no semblance of blasphemy: yet how vehement is Caiaphas for an answer! as if those words had already battered that sacred pile, or the protestation of his ability had been the highest treason against the God of the Temple.

That infinite Wisdom knew well how little satisfaction there could be in answers where the sentence was determined; *Jesus held his peace.* Where the asker is unworthy, the question captious, words bootless, the best answer is silence.

Erewhile, his just and moderate speech to Annas was returned with a buffet on the cheek: now his silence is no less displeasing. Caiaphas was not more malicious than crafty: what was in vain attempted by witnesses shall be drawn out of Christ's own mouth; what an accusation could not effect, an adjuration shall; *I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.* Yea, this was the way to screw out a killing answer. Caiaphas, thy mouth was impure, but thy charge is dreadful. Now, if Jesus holds his peace, he is cried down for a profane disregard of that awful name; if he answer, he is ensnared: an affirmation is death; a denial, worse than death. No, Caiaphas, thou shalt well know it was not fear that all this while stopped that gracious mouth. Thou speakest to him that cannot fear those faces he hath made. He that hath charged us to confess him cannot but confess himself; *Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said.*

There is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence. He that is the Wisdom of his Father hath here given us a pattern of both. We may not so speak as to give advantage to cavils, we may not be so silent as to betray the truth.

Thou shalt have no more cause, proud and insulting Caiaphas, to complain of a speechless prisoner: now thou shalt hear more than thou demandedst; *Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.* There spake my Saviour, *the voice of God, and not of man.* Hear now, insolent high priest, and be confounded. That Son of man whom thou seest is the Son of God, whom thou canst not see: that Son of man, that Son of God, that God and man, whom thou now seest standing despicably before thy consistorial seat in a base dejectedness, Him shalt thou once with horror and trembling see majestically sitting on the throne of heaven, at-

tended with thousand thousands of angels, and coming in the clouds to that dreadful judgment, wherein thyself, amongst other damned malefactors, shalt be presented before that glorious tribunal of his, and adjudged to thy just torments.

Go now, wretched hypocrite, and rend thy garments, while, in the mean time, thou art worthy to have thy soul rent from thy body, for thy spiteful blasphemy against the Son of God.

Onwards, thy pretence is fair, and such as cannot but receive applause from thy compacted crew; *What need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? And they answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

What heed is to be taken of mens' judgment? So light are they upon the balance, that one dram of prejudice or forestalment turns the scales. Who were these but the grave benchers of Jerusalem, the synod of the choice rabbies of Israel? Yet these pass sentence against the Lord of life; sentence of that death of his, whereby, if ever, they shall be redeemed from the murder of their sentence.

O Saviour, this is not the last time wherein thou hast received cruel dooms from them that profess learning and holiness. What wonder is it if thy weak members suffer that which was endured by so perfect an Head? What care we to be judged by man's day, when thou, who art the righteous Judge of the world, wert thus misjudged by men?

Now is the fury of thy malignant enemies let loose upon thee; what measure can be too hard for him that is denounced worthy of death? Now those foul mouths defile thy blessed face with their impure spittle, the venomous froth of their malice: now those cruel hands are lifted up to buffet thy sacred cheeks: now scorn and insultation triumphs over thine humble patience; *Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who it is that smote thee.* O dear Jesu, what a beginning is here of a passion! There thou standest, bound, condemned, spat upon, buffeted, derided by malicious sinners. Thou art bound, who camest to loose the bands of death; thou art condemned, whose sentence must acquit the world; thou art spat upon that art *fairer than the sons of men;* thou art buffeted, *in whose mouth was no guile;* thou art derided, who *art clothed with glory and majesty.*

In the mean while, how can I enough wonder at thy infinite mercy, who in the midst of all these woful indignities couldst find a time to cast thine eyes back upon thy frail and ungrateful dis-

ciple; and in whose gracious ear Peter's cock sounded louder than all these reproaches? O Saviour, thou who in thine apprehension couldst forget all thy danger, to correct and heal his overlashing, now in the heat of thy arraignment and condemnation canst forget thy own misery to reclaim his error, and by that seasonable glance of thine eye to strike his heart with a needful remorse.

He that was lately so valiant to fight for thee now, the next morning is so cowardly as to deny thee: he shrinks at the voice of a maid, who was not daunted with the sight of a band. O Peter, had thy slip been sudden, thy fall had been more easy. Premonition aggravates thy offence; that stone was foreshewed thee whereat thou stumbledst: neither did thy warning more add to thy guilt than thine own foreresolution. How didst thou vow, though thou shouldst die with thy Master, not to deny him! Hadst thou said nothing, but answered with a trembling silence, thy shame had been the less. Good purposes, when they are not held, do so far turn enemies to the entertainer of them, as that they help to double both his sin and punishment.

Yet a single denial had been but easy: thine, I fear to speak it, was lined with swearing and execration.

Whence then, O whence was this so vehement and peremptory disclamation of so gracious a Master? What such danger had attended thy profession of his attendance? One of thy fellows was known to the high priest for a follower of Jesus; yet he not only came himself into that open hall in view of the bench, but treated with the maid that kept the door to let thee in also. She knew him for what he was; and could therefore speak to thee, as brought in by his mediation, *Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? Thou also* supposes the first acknowledged such; yet what crime, what danger was urged upon that noted disciple? What could have been more to thee? Was it that thy heart misgave thee thou mightest be called to account for Malchus? It was no thank to thee that that ear was healed; neither did there want those that would think how near that ear was to the head. Doubtless, that busy fellow himself was not far off; and his fellows and kinsmen would have been apt enough to follow thee, besides thy discipleship, upon a bloodshed, a riot, a rescue. Thy conscience hath made thee thus unduly timorous; and now, to be sure to avoid the imputation of that affray, thou renouncest all knowledge of him in whose cause thou foughtest.

Howsoever, the sin was heinous. I tremble at such a fall of so great an apostle. It was thou, O Peter, that buffetedst thy Master more than those Jews: it was to thee that he turned the cheek from them, as to view him by whom he most smarted: he felt thee afar off, and answered thee with a look; such a look as was able to kill and revive at once. "Thou hast wounded me," mayest thou now say, "O my Saviour, *thou hast wounded my heart with one of thine eyes:* that one eye of thy mercy hath wounded my heart with a deep remorse for my grievous sin, with an indignation at my unthankfulness: that one glance of thine hath resolved me into the tears of sorrow and contrition: *O that mine eyes were fountains,* and my cheeks channels that shall never be dried!" *And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.—Matthew xxvii.

Well worthy were these Jews to be tributary. They had cast off the yoke of their God, and had justly earned this Roman servitude. Tiberius had befriended them too well with so favourable a governor as Pilate. Had they had the power of life and death in their hands, they had not been beholden to an heathen for a legal murder. I know not whether they more repine at this slavery, or please themselves to think how cleanly they can shift off this blood into another's hand. These great masters of Israel flock from their own consistory to Pilate's judgment hall. The sentence had been theirs, the execution must be his: and now they hope to bear down Jesus with the stream of that frequent confluence.

But what ails you, O ye rulers of Israel, that ye stand thus thronging at the door? Why do ye not go in to that public room of judicature, to call for that justice ye came for? Was it for that ye would not defile yourselves with the contagion of an heathen roof? Holy men! your consciences would not suffer you to yield to so impure an act; your passover must be kept, your persons must be clean: while ye expect justice from the man, ye abhor the pollution of the place. Woe to you, priests, scribes, elders, hypocrites: can there be any roof so unclean as that of your own breasts? Not Pilate's walls, but your hearts are impure. Is murder your errand; and do you stick at a local infection? *God shall smite* you, ye *whited walls.* Do ye long to be stained with

blood, with the blood of God? and do ye fear to be defiled with the touch of Pilate's pavement? Doth so small a gnat stick in your throats, while ye swallow such a camel of flagitious wickedness? Go out of yourselves, ye false dissemblers, if ye would not be unclean. Pilate, onwards, hath more cause to fear lest his walls should be defiled with the presence of so prodigious monsters of impiety.

That plausible governor condescends to humour their superstition. They dare not come in to him; he yields to go forth to them. Even Pilate begins justly, *What accusation bring you against this man?* It is no judging of religion by the outward demeanour of men; there is more justice amongst Romans than amongst Jews. These malicious rabbies thought it enough that they had sentenced Jesus; no more was now expected but a speedy execution. *If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.* Civil justice must be their hangman: it is enough conviction that he is delivered up to the secular powers: themselves have judged; these other must kill.

Pilate and Caiaphas have changed places: this pagan speaks that law and justice which that high priest should have done; and that high priest speaks those murdering incongruities which would better have beseemed the mouth of a pagan. "What needs any new trial? Dost thou know, Pilate, who we are? Is this the honour that thou givest to our sacred priesthood? Is this thy valuation of our sanctity? Had the basest of the vulgar complained to thee, thou couldst but have put them to a review. Our place and holiness looked not to be distrusted. If our scrupulous consciences suspect thy very walls, thou mayest well think there is small reason to suspect our consciences. Upon a full hearing, ripe deliberation, and exquisitely judicial proceeding, we have sentenced this malefactor to death; there needs no more from thee but thy command of execution." O monster, whether of malice or unjustice! Must he then be a malefactor whom ye will condemn? Is your bare word ground enough to shed blood? Whom did ye ever kill but the righteous? By whose hands perished the prophets? The word was but mistaken; ye should have said, "If we had not been malefactors, we had never delivered up this innocent man unto thee."

It must needs be notoriously unjust which very nature hath taught pagans to abhor. Pilate sees and hates this bloody suggestion and practice: "Do ye pretend holiness, and urge so in-

jurious a violence? If he be such as ye accuse him, where is his conviction? If he cannot be legally convicted, why should he die? Do you think I may take your complaint for a crime? If I must judge for you, why have you judged for yourselves? Could ye suppose that I would condemn any man unheard? If your Jewish laws yield you this liberty, the Roman laws yield it not to me. It is not for me to judge after your laws, but after our own. Your prejudgment may not sway me: since ye have gone so far, be ye your own carvers of justice; *Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.*" O Pilate, how happy had it been for thee if thou hadst held thee there! Thus thou hadst washed thy hands more clean than in all thy basons. Might law have been the rule of this judgment, and not malice, this blood had not been shed.

How palpably doth their tongue bewray their heart! *It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.* Pilate talks of judgment, they talk of death: this was their only aim. Law was but a colour; judgment was but a ceremony; death was their drift; and without this, nothing. Bloodthirsty priests and elders! it is well that this power of yours is restrained: no innocence could have been safe, if your lawless will had had no limits. It were pity this sword should be in any but just and sober hands. Your fury did not always consult with law: what law allowed your violence to Stephen, to Paul and Barnabas, and your deadly attempts against this blessed Jesus whom ye now persecute? How lawful was it for you to procure that death which ye could not inflict? It is all the care of hypocrites to seek umbrages and pretences for their hateful purposes, and to make no other use of laws, whether divine or human, but to serve turns.

Where death is foreresolved there cannot want accusations. Malice is not so barren as not to yield crimes enough. *And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute unto Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ and king.* What accusations saidst thou, O Pilate? Heinous and capital. Thou mightest have believed our confident intimation; but since thou wilt needs urge us to particulars, know that we come furnished with such an indictment as shall make thine ears glow to hear it. Besides that blasphemy whereof he hath been condemned by us, this man is a seducer of the people, a raiser of sedition, an usurper of sovereignty." O impudent suggestion! What marvel is it, O Saviour, if thine honest servants be loaded with slanders, when thy

most innocent person escaped not so shameful criminations? Thou a perverter of the nation, who taughtest the way of God truly! Thou a forbidder of tribute, who payedst it, who prescribedst it, who provedst it to be Cæsar's due! Thou a challenger of temporal sovereignty who avoidedst it, renouncedst it, professedst to come to serve! O the forehead of malice! Go, ye shameless traducers, and swear that truth is guilty of all falsehood, justice of all wrong, and that the sun is the only cause of darkness, fire of cold.

Now Pilate startles at the charge. The name of tribute, the name of Cæsar, is in mention: these potent spells can fetch him back to the common hall, and call Jesus to the bar. There, O Saviour, standest thou meekly to be judged, who shalt once come to judge the quick and the dead. Then shall he, before whom thou stoodest guiltless and dejected, stand before thy dreadful Majesty guilty and trembling.

The name of a king, of Cæsar, is justly tender and awful. The least whisper of an usurpation or disturbance is entertained with a jealous care. Pilate takes this intimation at the first bound; *Art thou, then, the King of the Jews?* He felt his own freehold now touched; it was time for him to stir. Daniel's weeks were now famously known to be near expiring. Many arrogant and busy spirits, (as Judas of Galilee, Theudas, and that Egyptian seducer,) taking that advantage, had raised several conspiracies, set up new titles to the crown, gathered forces to maintain their false claims. Perhaps Pilate supposed some such business now on foot; and therefore asks so curiously, *Art thou the King of the Jews?*

He, that was no less Wisdom than Truth, thought it not best either to affirm or deny at once. Sometimes it may be extremely prejudicial to speak all truths. To disclaim that title suddenly which had been of old given him by the prophets, at his birth by the eastern sages, and now lately at his procession by the acclaiming multitude, had been injurious to himself; to profess and challenge it absolutely, had been unsafe, and needlessly provoking. By wise and just degrees, therefore, doth he so affirm this truth, that he both satisfies the inquirer, and takes off all peril and prejudice from his assertion. Pilate shall know him a King; but such a King as no king needs to fear, as all kings ought to acknowledge and adore: *My kingdom is not of this world.*

It is your mistaking, O ye earthly potentates, that is guilty of

your fears. Herod hears of a King born, and is troubled; Pilate hears of a King of the Jews, and is incensed. Were ye not ignorant, ye could not be jealous. Had ye learned to distinguish of kingdoms, these suspicions would vanish. There are secular kingdoms, there are spiritual; neither of these trenches upon other: your kingdom is secular, Christ's is spiritual; both may, both must stand together. His laws are divine, yours civil; His reign is eternal, yours temporal; the glory of His rule is inward, and stands in the graces of sanctification, love, peace, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost; yours in outward pomp, riches, magnificence: His enemies are the devil, the world, the flesh; yours are bodily usurpers and external peacebreakers; His sword is the power of the word and Spirit, yours material; His rule is over the conscience, yours over bodies and lives; He punishes with hell; ye with temporal death or torture. Yea, so far is he from opposing your government, that *by Him* ye *kings reign:* your sceptres are his, but to maintain, not to wield, not to resist. O the unjust fears of vain men! He takes not away your earthly kingdoms who gives you heavenly; He discrowns not the body who crowns the soul; His intention is not to make you less great, but more happy.

The charge is so fully answered, that Pilate acquits the Prisoner. The Jewish masters stand still without; their very malice dares not venture their pollution in going in to prosecute their accusation. Pilate hath examined him within, and now comes forth to these eager complainants with a cold answer to their over-hot expectations; *I find in him no fault at all.* O noble testimony of Christ's innocence from that mouth which afterwards doomed him to death!

What difference there is betwixt a man, as he is himself, and as he is the servant of others' wills! It is Pilate's tongue that says, *I find in him no fault at all;* it is the Jews' tongue in Pilate's mouth that says, *Let him be crucified.* That cruel sentence cannot blot him whom his attestation cleareth.

Neither doth he say, "I find him not guilty in that whereof he is accused;" but gives an universal acquittance of the whole carriage of Christ, *I find in him no fault at all.* In spite of malice, innocence shall find abettors. Rather than Christ shall want witnesses, the mouth of Pilate shall be opened to his justification. How did these Jewish bloodsuckers stand thunderstricken with so unexpected a word! His absolution was their death, his acquittal

their conviction. "*No fault,* when we have found crimes? *No fault at all,* when we have condemned him for capital offences? How palpably doth Pilate give us the lie! How shamefully doth he affront our authority and disparage our justice!" So ingenuous a testimony doubtless exasperated the fury of these Jews: the fire of their indignation was sevenfold more intended with the sense of their repulse.

I tremble to think how just Pilate as yet was, and how soon after depraved; yea, how merciful, together with that justice. How fain would he have freed Jesus, whom he found faultless!

Corrupt custom, in memory of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, allowed to gratify the Jews with the free delivery of some one prisoner. Tradition would be encroaching; the Paschal Lamb was monument enough of that happy rescue; men affect to have something of their own. Pilate was willing to take this advantage of dismissing Jesus. That he might be the more likely to prevail, he proposeth him with the choice and nomination of so notorious a malefactor as he might justly think uncapable of all mercy; Barabbas, a thief, a murderer, a seditionary; infamous for all, odious to all. Had he propounded some other innocent prisoner, he might have feared the election would be doubtful: he cannot misdoubt the competition of so prodigious a malefactor. *Then they all cried again, Not Him, but Barabbas.* O malice, beyond all example shameless and bloody! Who can but blush to think that an heathen should see Jews so impetuously unjust, so savagely cruel? He knew there was no fault to be found in Jesus, he knew there was no crime that was not to be found in Barabbas; yet he hears, and blushes to hear, them say, *Not Him, but Barabbas.*

Was not this, think we, out of similitude of condition? Every thing affects the like to itself; every thing affects the preservation of that it liketh. What wonder is it then, if ye Jews, who profess yourselves the murderers of that Just One, favour a Barabbas?

O Saviour, what a killing indignity was this for thee to hear from thine own nation! Hast thou refused all glory, to put on shame and misery for their sakes? hast thou disregarded thy blessed Self, to save them? and do they refuse thee for Barabbas? Hast thou said, "Not heaven, but earth; not sovereignty, but service; not the Gentile, but the Jew?" and do they say, *Not* him, *but Barabbas? Do ye thus requite the Lord, O ye*

foolish people and unjust? Thus were thine ears and thine eyes first crucified; and, through them, was thy soul wounded even to death before thy death, while thou sawest their rage, and heardest their noise of *Crucify, crucify.*

Pilate would have chastised thee. Even that had been a cruel mercy from him; for what evil hadst thou done? But that cruelty had been true mercy to this of the Jews, whom no blood would satisfy but that of thy heart. He calls for thy fault; they call for thy punishment: as proclaiming thy crucifixion is not intended to satisfy justice, but malice, *they cried the more, Crucify him, crucify him.*

As their clamour grew, so the President's justice declined. Those graces that lie loose and ungrounded are easily washed away with the first tide of popularity. Thrice had that man proclaimed the innocence of him whom he now inclines to condemn, *willing to content the people.* O the foolish aims of ambition! Not God, not his conscience, come into any regard; but the people. What a base idol doth the proud man adore! even the vulgar, which a base man despiseth. What is their applause but an idle wind? what is their anger but a painted fire? O Pilate, where now is thyself and thy people? whereas a good conscience would have stuck by thee for ever; and have given thee boldness before the face of that God which thou and thy people shall never have the happiness to behold.

The Jews have played their first part; the Gentiles must now act theirs. Cruel Pilate, who knew Jesus was *delivered for envy,* accused falsely, maliciously pursued, hath turned his proffered chastisement into scourging; *Then Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him.* Woe is me, dear Saviour! I feel thy lashes; I shrink under thy painful whippings; thy nakedness covers me with shame and confusion. That tender and precious body of thine is galled and torn with cords. Thou, that didst of late water the garden of Gethsemane with the drops of thy bloody sweat, dost now bedew the pavement of Pilate's hall with the showers of thy blood. How fully hast thou made good thy word, *I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting!* How can I be enough sensible of my own stripes? These blows are mine: both my sins have given them, and they give remedies to my sins. *He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was*

upon him, and with his stripes are we healed. O blessed Jesu, why should I think strange to be scourged with tongue or hand, when I see thee bleeding? What lashes can I fear, either from heaven or earth, since thy scourges have been borne for me, and have sanctified them to me? Now, dear Jesu, what a world of insolent reproaches, indignities, tortures, art thou entering into! To an ingenuous and tender disposition scorns are torment enough; but here, pain helps to perfect thy misery, their despite

Who should be actors in this whole bloody execution but grim and barbarous soldiers; men inured to cruelty, in whose faces were written the characters of murder, whose very trade was killing, and whose looks were enough to prevent their hands? These, for the greater terror of their concourse, are called together; and, whether by the connivance or the command of their wicked governor, or by the instigation of the malicious Jews, conspire to anticipate his death with scorns which they will after inflict with violence.

O my blessed Saviour, was it not enough that thy sacred body was stripped of thy garments, and wealed with bloody stripes, but that thy person must be made the mocking stock of thine insulting enemies, thy back disguised with purple robes, thy temples wounded with a thorny crown, thy face spat upon, thy cheeks buffeted, thy head smitten, thy hand sceptred with a reed, thyself derided with wry mouths, bended knees, scoffing acclamations?

Insolent soldiers! whence is all this jeering and sport, but to flout Majesty? All these are the ornaments and ceremonies of a royal inauguration, which now in scorn ye cast upon my despised Saviour. Go on; make yourselves merry with this jolly pastime. Alas! long ago, ye now feel, whom ye scorned. Is he a King, think you, whom ye thus played upon? Look upon him with gnashing and horror whom ye looked at with mockage and insultation. Was not that head fit for your thorns which you now see crowned with glory and majesty? was not that hand fit for a reed, whose iron scepter crushes you to death? was not that face fit to be spat upon, from the dreadful aspect whereof ye are ready to desire the mountains to cover you?

In the mean time, whither, O whither dost thou stoop, O thou coeternal Son of thine eternal Father? whither dost thou abase thyself for me? I have sinned, and thou art punished: I have exalted myself, and thou art dejected: I have clad myself with

shame, and thou art stripped: I have made myself naked, and thou art clothed with robes of dishonour: my head hath devised evil, and thine is pierced with thorns: I have smitten thee, and thou art smitten for me: I have dishonoured thee, and thou for my sake art scorned: thou art made the sport of men for me, that have deserved to be insulted on by devils.

Thus disguised, thus bleeding, thus mangled, thus deformed, art thou brought forth, whether for compassion or for a more universal derision, to the furious multitude, with an *Ecce homo! Behold the man!* look upon him, O ye merciless Jews: see him in his shame, in his wounds and blood; and now see whether ye think him miserable enough. Ye see his face blue and black with buffeting, his eyes swoln, his cheeks beslavered with spittle, his skin torn with scourges, his whole body bathed in blood; and would ye yet have more? *Behold the man!* the man whom ye envied for his greatness, whom ye feared for his usurpation. Doth he not look like a king? Is he not royally dressed? See whether his magnificence do not command reverence from you. Would ye wish a finer king? Are ye not afraid he will wrest the sceptre out of Cæsar's hand? *Behold the man!*

Yea, and behold him well, O thou proud Pilate, O ye cruel soldiers, O ye insatiable Jews. Ye see him base whom ye shall see glorious. The time shall surely come wherein ye shall see him in another dress. He shall shine whom ye now see to bleed. His crown cannot be now so ignominious and painful as it shall be once majestical and precious. Ye, who now bend your knees to him in scorn, shall see all knees, both in heaven and in earth, and under the earth, to bow before him in an awful adoration. Ye, that now see him with contempt, shall behold him with horror.

What an inward war do I yet find in the breast of Pilate! His conscience bids him spare; his popularity bids him kill. His wife, warned by a dream, warns him to have no hand in the blood of that just man; the importunate multitude presses him for a sentence of death. All shifts have been tried to free the man whom he hath pronounced innocent: all violent motives are urged to condemn that man whom malice pretends guilty.

In the height of this strife, when conscience and moral justice were ready to sway Pilate's distracted heart to a just dismission, I hear the Jews cry out, *If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.* There is the word that strikes it dead: it is

now no time to demur any more. In vain shall we hope that a carnal heart can prefer the care of his soul to the care of his safety and honour; God, to Cæsar. Now Jesus must die. Pilate hastes into the judgment hall: the sentence sticks no longer in his teeth; *Let him be crucified.*

Yet how foul soever his soul shall be with this fact, his hands shall be clean; *He took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.* Now all is safe I wis. This is expiation enough.

Water can wash off blood; the hands can cleanse the heart. Protest thou art innocent, and thou canst not be guilty. Vain hypocrite! canst thou think to escape so? Is murder of no deeper dye? Canst thou dream waking, thus to avoid the charge of thy wife's dream? Is the guilt of the blood of the Son of God to be wiped off with such ease? What poor shifts do foolish sinners make to beguile themselves! Any thing will serve to charm the conscience when it lists to sleep.

But, O Saviour, while Pilate thinks to wash off the guilt of thy blood with water, I know there is nothing that can wash off the guilt of this his sin but thy blood. O do thou wash my soul in that precious bath, and I shall be clean. O Pilate, if that very blood which thou sheddest do not wash off the guilt of thy bloodshed, thy water doth but more defile thy soul, and intend that fire wherewith thou burnest.

Little did the desperate Jews know the weight of that blood which they were so forward to wish upon themselves and their children. Had they deprecated their interest in that horrible murder, they could not so easily have avoided the vengeance; but now that they fetch it upon themselves by a willing execration, what should I say, but that they long for a curse? It is pity they should not be miserable.

And have ye not now felt, O nation worthy of plagues, have ye not now felt what blood it was whose guilt ye affected? Sixteen hundred years are now past since you wished yourselves thus wretched: have ye not been, ever since, the hate and scorn of the world? Did ye not live, many of you, to see your city buried in ashes, and drowned in blood? to see yourselves no nation? Was there ever people under heaven that was made so famous a spectacle of misery and desolation? Have ye yet enough of that blood which ye called for upon yourselves and your children? Your former cruelties, uncleannesses, idolatries, cost you but

some short captivities: God cannot but be just: this sin, under which you now lie groaning and forlorn, must needs be so much greater than these as your vastation is more; and what can that be, other than the murder of the Lord of life? Ye have what ye wished: be miserable till ye be penitent.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

Matthew xxvii; Mark xv; Luke xxiii; John xix.

The sentence of death is passed; and now who can with dry eyes behold the sad pomp of my Saviour's bloody execution? All the streets are full of gazing spectators, waiting for this rueful sight. At last, O Saviour, there thou comest out of Pilate's gate, bearing that which shall soon bear thee. To expect thy Cross was not torment enough, thou must carry it. All this while thou shalt not only see, but feel thy death before it come; and must help to be an agent in thine own passion.

It was not out of favour, that, those scornful robes being stripped off, thou art led to death in thine own clothes. So was thy face besmeared with blood, so swoln and discoloured with buffetings, that thou couldst not have been known but by thy wonted habit.

Now, thine insulting enemies are so much more imperiously cruel, as they are more sure of their success. Their merciless tormentings have made thee half dead already: yet now, as if they had done nothing, they begin afresh, and will force thy weakened and fainting nature to new tasks of pain. The transverse of thy Cross at least is upon thy shoulder; when thou canst scarce go, thou must carry. One kicks thee with his foot, another strikes thee with his staff, another drags thee hastily by thy cord, and more than one spur on thine unpitied weariness with angry commands of haste.

O true form and state of a servant! All thy former actions, O Saviour, were (though painful, yet) free; this, as it is in itself servile, so it is tyrannously enforced; enforced yet more upon thee by thy own love to mankind than by their power and despite. It was thy Father that *laid upon* thee *the iniquity of us all;* it was thine own mercy that caused thee to bear our sins upon the Cross, and to bear the Cross, with the curse annexed to it, for our sins.

How much more voluntary must that needs be in thee, which

thou requirest to be voluntarily undertaken by us! It was thy charge, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* Thou didst not say, "Let him bear his cross," as forcibly imposed by another; but, *Let him take up his cross*, as his free burden: free, in respect of his heart, not in respect of his hand: so free, that he shall willingly undergo it when it is laid upon him, not so free as that he shall lay it upon himself unrequired. O Saviour, thou didst not snatch the cross out of the soldiers' hands and cast it upon thy shoulder, but when they laid it on thy neck thou underwentest it. The constraint was theirs, the will was thine.

It was not so heavy to them or to Simon as it was to thee: they felt nothing but the wood, thou feltest it clogged with the load of the sins of the whole world. No marvel if thou faintedst under that sad burden; thou that bearest up the whole earth by thy word, didst sweat and pant and groan under this insupportable carriage. O blessed Jesu, how could I be confounded in myself to see thee, after so much loss of blood and overtoiledness of pain, languishing under that fatal tree! And yet, why should it more trouble me to see thee sinking under thy cross now, than to see thee anon hanging upon thy cross? In both, thou wouldst render thyself weak and miserable, that thou mightest so much the more glorify thy infinite mercy in suffering.

It is not out of any compassion of thy misery, or care of thine ease, that Simon of Cyrene is forced to be the porter of thy cross; it was out of their own eagerness of thy despatch: thy feeble paces were too slow for their purpose; their thirst after thy blood made them impatient of delay. If thou have wearily struggled with the burden of thy shame all along the streets of Jerusalem, when thou comest once past the gates, an helper shall be deputed to thee: the expedition of thy death was more sweet to them than the pain of a lingering passage. What thou saidst to Judas, they say to the executioner, *What thou doest, do quickly.* While thou yet livest they cannot be quiet, they cannot be safe: to hasten thine end they lighten thy carriage.

Hadst thou done this out of choice which thou didst out of constraint, how I should have envied thee, O Simon of Cyrene; as too happy in the honour to be the first man that bore that cross of thy Saviour, wherein millions of blessed martyrs have since that time been ambitious to succeed thee! Thus to bear thy cross for thee, O Saviour, was more than to bear a crown from thee.

Could I be worthy to be thus graced by thee, I should pity all other glories.

While thou thus passest, O dear Jesu, the streets and ways resound not all with one note. If the malicious Jews and cruel soldiers insulted upon thee, and either haled or railed thee on with a bitter violence, thy faithful followers were no less loud in their moans and ejulations; neither would they endure that the noise of their cries and lamentations should be drowned with the clamour of those reproaches; but especially thy blessed mother, and those other zealous associates of her own sex, were most passionate in their wailings. And why should I think that all that devout multitude which so lately cried Hosanna in the streets did not also bear their part in these public condolings?

Though it had not concerned thyself, O Saviour, thine ears had been still more open to the voice of grief than of malice: and so thy lips also are open to the one, shut to the other; *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.* Who would not have thought, O Saviour, that thou shouldst have been wholly taken up with thine own sorrows? The expectation of so bitter a death had been enough to have overwhelmed any soul but thine: yet even now can thy gracious eye find time to look beyond thine own miseries at theirs; and to pity them who, insensible of their own ensuing condition, mourned for thine now present. They see thine extremity; thou foreseest theirs: they pour out their sorrow upon thee; thou divertest it upon themselves. We, silly creatures, walk blindfolded in this vale of tears, and little know what evil is towards us: only what we feel we know; and while we feel nothing, can find leisure to bestow our commiseration on those who need it perhaps less than ourselves. Even now, O Saviour, when thou wert within the view of thy Calvary, thou canst foresee and pity the vastation of thy Jerusalem, and givest a sad prophecy of the imminent destruction of that city, which lately had cost thee tears, and now shall cost thee blood. It is not all the indign cruelty of men that can rob thee of thy mercy.

Jerusalem could not want malefactors, though Barabbas was dismissed. That all this execution might seem to be done out of the zeal of justice, two capital offenders, adjudged to their gibbet, shall accompany thee, O Saviour, both to thy death and in it. They are led manacled after thee, as less criminal: no stripes had disabled them from bearing their own crosses. Long ago was

this unmeet society foretold by thine evangelical seer; *He was taken from prison and from judgment: he was cut out of the land of the living: he made his grave with the wicked.* O blessed Jesu, it had been disparagement enough to thee to be sorted with the best of men, since there is much sin in the perfectest, and there could be no sin in thee; but to be matched with the scum of mankind, whom vengeance would not let to live, is such an indignity as confounds my thoughts. Surely there is no angel in heaven but would have been proud to attend thee; and what could the earth afford worthy of thy train? yet malice hath suited thee with company next to hell; that their viciousness might reflect upon thee, and their sin might stain thine innocence.

Ye are deceived, O ye fond judges: this is the way to grace your dying malefactors; this is not the way to disgrace Him whose guiltlessness and perfection triumphed over your injustice. His presence was able to make your thieves happy; their presence could no more blemish him than your own.

Thus guarded, thus attended, thus accompanied art thou, blessed Jesu, led to that loathsome and infamous hill which now thy last blood shall make sacred. Now thou settest thy foot upon that rising ground, which shall prevent thine Olivet, whence thy soul shall first ascend into thy glory.

There, while thou art addressing thyself for thy last act, thou art presented with that bitter and farewell potion wherewith dying malefactors were wont to have their senses stupified, that they might not feel the torments of their execution. It was but the common mercy of men to alleviate the death of offenders, since the intent of their last doom is not so much pain as dissolution.

That draught, O Saviour, was not more welcome to the guilty than hateful unto thee. In the vigour of all thine inward and outward senses, thou wouldst encounter the most violent assaults of death, and scornedst to abate the least touch of thy quickest apprehension. Thou well knewest that the work thou wentest about would require the use of all thy powers. It was not thine ease that thou soughtest, but our redemption; neither meantest thou to yield to thy last enemy, but to resist and to overcome him: which that thou mightest do the more gloriously, thou challengedst him to do his worst; and in the mean time wouldst not disfurnish thyself of any of thy powerful faculties. This

greatest combat that ever was shall be fought on even hand; neither wouldst thou steal that victory which thou now achievedst over death and hell.

Thou didst but touch at this cup; it is a far bitterer than this that thou art now drinking up to the dregs: thou refusedst that which was offered thee by men; but that which was mixed by thine eternal Father, though mere gall and wormwood, thou didst drink up to the last drop. And therein, O blessed Jesu, lies all our health and salvation. I know not whether I do more suffer in thy pain or joy in the issue of thy suffering.

Now, even now, O Saviour, art thou entering into those dreadful lists, and now art thou grappling with thy last enemy. As if thou hadst not suffered till now, now thy bloody passion begins.

A cruel expoliation begins that violence. Again do these grim and merciless soldiers lay their rude hands upon thee, and strip thee naked; again are those bleeding weals laid open to all eyes; again must thy sacred body undergo the shame of an abhorred nakedness. Lo, thou that clothest man with raiment, beasts with hides, fishes with scales and shells, earth with flowers, heaven with stars, art despoiled of clothes, and standest exposed to the scorn of all beholders. As the first Adam entered into his paradise, so dost thou, the second Adam, into thine, naked; and as the first Adam was clothed with innocence when he had no clothes, so wert thou, the second, too: and more than so; thy nakedness, O Saviour, clothes our souls, not with innocence only, but with beauty. Hadst not thou been naked, we had been clothed with confusion. O happy nakedness, whereby we are covered from shame! O happy shame, whereby we are invested with glory! All the beholders stand wrapped with warm garments; thou only art stripped, to tread the winepress alone. How did thy blessed mother now wish her veil upon thy shoulders! and that disciple, who lately ran from thee naked, wished in vain that his loving pity might do that for thee which fear forced him to for himself.

Shame is succeeded with pain. O the torment of the cross! Methinks I see and feel, how, having fastened the transverse to the body of that fatal tree, and laid it upon the ground, they racked and strained thy tender and sacred limbs to fit the extent of their fore-appointed measure, and having tentered out thine arms beyond their natural reach, how they fastened them with cords, till those strong iron nails which were driven up to the head through the palms of thy blessed hands, had not more firmly

than painfully fixed thee to the gibbet. The tree is raised up; and now, not without a vehement concussion, settled in the mortise. Woe is me, how are thy joints and sinews torn and stretched till they crack again by this torturing distension! How doth thine own weight torment thee, while thy whole body rests upon this forced and dolorous hold, till thy nailed feet bear their part in a no less afflictive supportation! How did the rough iron pierce thy soul, while passing through those tender and sensible parts it carried thy flesh before it, and as it were riveted it to that shameful tree!

There now, O dear Jesu, there thou hangest between heaven and earth; naked, bleeding, forlorn, despicable, the spectacle of miseries, the scorn of men. Be abashed, O ye heavens and earth, and all ye creatures wrap up yourselves in horror and confusion to see the shame and pain and curse of your most pure and omnipotent Creator. How could ye subsist while he thus suffers in whom ye are? O Saviour, didst thou take flesh for our redemption to be thus indignly used, thus mangled, thus tortured? Was this measure fit to be offered to that sacred body that was conceived by the Holy Ghost of the pure substance of an immaculate Virgin? Woe is me, that which was unspotted with sin is all blemished with human cruelty, and so wofully disfigured, that the blessed mother that bore thee could not now have known thee; so bloody were thy temples, so swoln and discoloured was thy face, so was the skin of thy whole body streaked with red and blue stripes, so did thy thorny diadem shade thine heavenly countenance, so did the streams of thy blood cover and deform all thy parts. The eye of sense could not distinguish thee, O dear Saviour, in the nearest proximity to thy cross: the eye of faith sees thee in all this distance; and, by how much more ignominy, deformity, pain it finds in thee, so much more it admires the glory of thy mercy. Alas! is this the head that is decked by thine eternal Father with a crown of pure gold, of immortal and incomprehensible majesty, which is now bushed with thorns? Is this the eye that saw the heavens opened, and the Holy Ghost descending upon that head, that saw such resplendence of heavenly brightness on Mount Tabor, which now begins to be overclouded with death? Are these the ears that heard the voice of thy Father owning thee out of heaven, which now tingle with buffetings, and glow with reproaches, and bleed with thorns? Are these the lips that *spake as never man's spake, full of grace and power;* that called out dead

Lazarus, that ejected the stubbornest devils, that commanded the cure of all diseases, which now are swoln with blows, and discoloured with blueness and blood? Is this the face that should be *fairer than the sons of men*, which the angels of heaven so desired to see, and can never be satisfied with seeing, that is thus foul with the nasty mixtures of sweat and blood and spittings on? Are these the hands that *stretched out the heavens as a curtain*, that by their touch healed the lame, the deaf, the blind, which are now bleeding with the nails? Are these the feet which walked lately upon the liquid pavement of the sea, before whose footstool all the nations of the earth are bidden to worship, that are now so painfully fixed to the cross? O cruel and unthankful mankind, that offered such measure to the Lord of life! O infinitely merciful Saviour, that wouldst suffer all this for unthankful mankind! That fiends should do these things to guilty souls, it is (though terrible, yet) just; but that men should do thus to the blessed Son of God, it is beyond the capacity of our horror.

Even the most hostile dispositions have been only content to kill, death hath sated the most eager malice: thine enemies, O Saviour, held not themselves satisfied unless they might enjoy thy torment. Two thieves are appointed to be thy companions in death; thou art designed to the midst as the chief malefactor: on whether hand soever thou lookest, thine eye meets with an hateful partner.

But, O blessed Jesu, how shall I enough admire and celebrate thy infinite mercy, who madest so happy an use of this Jewish despite, as to improve it to the occasion of the salvation of one, and the comfort of millions! Is not this, as the last, so the greatest specialty of thy wonderful compassion, to convert that dying thief? with those nailed hands to snatch a soul out of the mouth of hell? Lord, how I bless thee for this work! How do I stand amazed at this, above all other the demonstrations of thy goodness and power! The offender came to die: nothing was in his thoughts but his guilt and torment: *while he was yet in his blood* thou *saidst, This soul shall live.* Ere yet the intoxicating potion could have time to work upon his brain, thy spirit infuses faith into his heart. He, that before had nothing in his eye but present death and torture, is now lifted up above his cross in a blessed ambition; *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* Is this the voice of a thief or of a disciple? Give me leave, O Saviour, to borrow thine own words; *Verily, I have not found so great faith,*

no not in all Israel. He saw thee hanging miserably by him, and yet styles thee *Lord;* he saw thee dying, yet talks of thy *kingdom;* he felt himself dying, yet talks of a future *remembrance.* O faith stronger than death, that can look beyond the cross at a crown, beyond dissolution at a remembrance of life and glory! Which of thine eleven were heard to speak so gracious a word to thee in these thy last pangs? After thy resurrection and knowledge of thine impassionable condition, it was not strange for them to talk of thy kingdom; but, in the midst of thy shameful death, for a dying malefactor to speak of thy reigning, and to implore thy remembrance of himself in thy kingdom, it is such an improvement of faith as ravisheth my soul with admiration. O blessed thief, that hast thus happily stolen heaven! How worthy hath thy Saviour made thee to be a partner of his sufferings, a pattern of undauntable belief, a spectacle of unspeakable mercy! *This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* Before, I wondered at thy faith; now, I envy at thy felicity. Thou cravedst a remembrance, thy Saviour speaks of a present possession, *This day;* thou suedst for remembrance as a favour to the absent, thy Saviour speaks of thy presence with him; thou spakest of a kingdom, thy Saviour of paradise. As no disciple could be more faithful, so no saint could be happier. O Saviour, what a precedent is this of thy free and powerful grace! Where thou wilt give, what unworthiness can bar us from mercy? When thou wilt give, what time can prejudice our vocation? Who can despair of thy goodness, when he, that in the morning was posting towards hell, is in the evening with thee in paradise? Lord, he could not have spoken this to thee, but by thee, and from thee. What possibility was there for a thief to think of thy kingdom without thy Spirit? That good Spirit of thine breathed upon this man, breathed not upon his fellow. Their trade was alike, their sin was alike, their state alike, their cross alike; only thy mercy makes them unlike: one is taken, the other is refused. Blessed be thy mercy in taking one, blessed be thy justice in leaving the other. Who can despair of that mercy? who cannot but tremble at that justice?

Now, O ye cruel priests and elders of the Jews, ye have full leisure to feed your eyes with the sight ye so much longed for. There is the blood ye purchased: and is not your malice yet glutted? Is not all this enough, without your taunts and scoffs and sports at so exquisite a misery? The people, the passengers are taught to insult where they should pity. Every man hath

a scorn ready to cast at a dying innocent. A generous nature is more wounded with the tongue than with the hand. O Saviour, thine ear was more painfully pierced than thy brows or hands or feet. It could not but go deep into thy soul, to hear these bitter and girding reproaches from them thou camest to save.

But, alas! what fleabitings were these, in comparison of those inward torments which thy soul felt in the sense and apprehension of thy Father's wrath for the sins of the whole world, which now lay heavy upon thee for satisfaction! This, O this was it that pressed thy soul, as it were, to the nethermost hell. While thine eternal Father looked lovingly upon thee, what didst thou, what neededst thou to care for the frowns of men or devils? but when he once turned his face from thee, or bent his brows upon thee, this, this was worse than death.

It is no marvel now if darkness were upon the face of the whole earth, when thy Father's face was eclipsed from thee by the interposition of our sins. How should there be light in the world without, when the God of the world, the Father of lights, complains of the want of light within? That word of thine, O Saviour, was enough to fetch the sun down out of heaven, and to dissolve the whole frame of nature, when thou criedst, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* O what pangs were these, dear Jesu, that drew from thee this complaint! Thou well knewest nothing could be more cordial to thine enemies than to hear this sad language from thee: they could see but the outside of thy sufferings; never could they have conceived so deep an anguish of thy soul, if thy own lips had not expressed it. Yet, as not regarding their triumph, thou thus pourest out thy sorrow; and when so much is uttered, who can conceive what is felt?

How is it then with thee, O Saviour, that thou thus astonishest men and angels with so woful a queritation? Had thy God left thee? Thou not long since saidst, *I and my Father are one.* Are ye now severed? Let this thought be as far from my soul as my soul from hell. No more can thy blessed Father be separated from thee than from his own essence. His union with thee is eternal; his vision was intercepted; he could not withdraw his presence; he would withdraw the influence of his comfort. Thou, the second Adam, stoodst for mankind upon this Tree of the Cross, as the first Adam stood and fell for mankind under the

Tree of Offence. Thou barest our sins: thy Father saw us in thee, and would punish us in thee; thee, for us. How could he but withhold comfort where he intended chastisement? Herein, therefore, he seems to forsake thee for the present, in that he would not deliver thee from that bitter passion which thou wouldst undergo for us. O Saviour, hadst thou not been thus forsaken, we had perished; thy dereliction is our safety: and however our narrow souls are not capable of the conceit of thy pain and horror, yet we know there can be no danger in the forsaking, while thou canst say, *My God*. He is so thy God as he cannot be ours: all our right is by adoption; thine, by nature: thou art one with him in eternal essence; we come in by grace and merciful election: yet, while thou shalt enable me to say *My God*, I shall hope never to sink under thy desertions.

But while I am transported with the sense of thy sufferings, O Saviour, let me not forget to admire those sweet mercies of thine which thou pouredst out upon thy persecutors. They rejoice in thy death, and triumph in thy misery, and scoff at thee in both; instead of calling down fire from heaven upon them, thou heapest coals of fire upon their heads; *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* They blaspheme thee; thou prayest for them: they scorn; thou pitiest: they sin against thee; thou prayest for their forgiveness: they profess their malice; thou pleadest their ignorance. O compassion without example, without measure, fit for the Son of God, the Saviour of men! Wicked and foolish Jews! ye would be miserable; he will not let you: ye would fain pull upon yourselves the guilt of his blood; he deprecates it: ye kill; he sues for your remission and life. His tongue cries louder than his blood; *Father, forgive them.* O Saviour, thou couldst not but be heard. Those who out of ignorance and simplicity thus persecuted thee find the happy issue of thine intercession. Now I see whence it was that three thousand souls were converted soon after at one sermon. It was not Peter's speech, it was thy prayer that was thus effectual. Now they have grace to know and confess whence they have both forgiveness and salvation, and can recompense their blasphemies with thanksgiving. What sin is there, Lord, whereof I can despair of the remission, or what offence can I be unwilling to remit, when thou prayest for the forgiveness of thy murderers and blasphemers?

There is no day so long but hath his evening. At last, O

blessed Saviour, thou art drawing to an end of these painful sufferings, when, spent with toil and torment, thou criest out, *I thirst.* How shouldst thou do other? O dear Jesu, how shouldst thou do other than thirst? The night thou hadst spent in watching, in prayer, in agony, in thy conveyance from the garden to Jerusalem, from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to Pilate, in thy restless answers, in buffetings and stripes; the day, in arraignments, in haling from place to place, in scourgings, in stripping, in robing and disrobing, in bleeding, in tugging under thy cross, in woundings and distension, in pain and passion: no marvel if thou thirstedst. Although there was more in this drought than thy need. It was no less requisite thou shouldst thirst, than that thou shouldst die. Both were upon the same predetermination, both upon the same prediction. How else should that word be verified, Psalm xxii. 14, 15. *All my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death?* Had it not been to make up that word whereof one jot cannot pass, though thou hadst felt this thirst, yet thou hadst not bewrayed it. Alas! what could it avail to bemoan thy wants to insulting enemies, whose sport was thy misery? How should they pity thy thirst that pitied not thy bloodshed? It was not their favour that thou expectedst herein, but their conviction. O Saviour, how can we, thy sinful servants, think much to be exercised with hunger and thirst, when we hear thee thus complain?

Thou that not long since proclaimedst in the temple, *If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink—he that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters*—now thyself thirstest. Thou, in whom we believe, complainest to want some drops. Thou hadst the command of all the waters both above the firmament and below it, yet thou wouldst thirst. Even so, Lord, thou, that wouldst die for us, wouldst thirst for us. O give me to thirst after those waters which thou promisest, whatever become of those waters which thou wouldst want. The time was, when, craving water of the Samaritan, thou gavest better than that thou askedst. O give me to thirst after that more precious water; and so do thou give me of that water of life, that I may never thirst again.

Blessed God, how marvellously dost thou contrive thine own

affairs! Thine enemies, while they would despite thee, shall unwittingly justify thee and convince themselves. As thou foresaidst, *In thy thirst they gave thee vinegar to drink.* Had they given thee wine, thou hadst not taken it. The night before thou hadst taken leave of that comfortable liquor, resolving to drink no more of that sweet juice till thou shouldst drink it new with them in thy Father's kingdom. Had they given thee water, they had not fulfilled that prediction whereby they were self-condemned.

I know not now, O dear Jesu, whether this last draught of thine were more pleasing to thee or more distasteful: distasteful in itself, for what liquor could be equally harsh? pleasing, in that it made up those sufferings thou wert to endure, and those prophecies thou wert to fulfil.

Now there is no more to do. Thy full consummation of all predictions, of all types and ceremonies, of all sufferings, of all satisfactions, is happily both effected and proclaimed[a]. Nothing now remains but[1] a voluntary, sweet, and heavenly resignation of thy blessed soul into the hands of thy eternal Father; and a bowing of thy head, for the change of a better crown; and a peaceable obdormition in thy bed of ease and honour; and an instant entrance into rest, triumph, glory.

And now, O blessed Jesu, how easily have carnal eyes all this while mistaken the passages and intentions of this thy last and most glorious work! Our weakness could hitherto see nothing here but pain and ignominy; now, my better-enlightened eyes see, in this elevation of thine, both honour and happiness. Lo, thou that art the Mediator betwixt God and man, the Reconciler of heaven and earth, art lift up betwixt earth and heaven, that thou mightest accord both. Thou, that art the great Captain of our Salvation, the Conqueror of all the adverse powers of death and hell, art exalted upon this triumphal chariot of the cross, that thou mightest trample upon death, and drag all those infernal principalities manacled after thee. Those arms, which thine enemies meant violently to extend, are stretched forth for the embracing of all mankind, that shall come in for the benefit of thine all-sufficient redemption.

Even while thou sufferest, thou reignest. O the impotent mad-

[a] For the full explication whereof, I refer my reader to my Passion Sermon; wherein the particularities are largely discussed.

ness of silly men! They think to disgrace thee with wry faces, with tongues put out, with bitter scoffs, with poor wretched indignities; when, in the mean time, *the heavens declare thy righteousness, O Lord,* and the earth shows forth thy power. The sun pulls in his light, as not abiding to see the sufferings of his Creator; the earth trembles under the sense of the wrong done to her Maker; the rocks rend; the veil of the Temple tears from the top to the bottom; shortly, all the frame of the world acknowledges the dominion of that Son of God whom man despised.

Earth and hell have done their worst. O Saviour, thou art in thy Paradise, and triumphest over the malice of men and devils. The remainders of thy sacred person are not yet free. The soldiers have parted thy garments and cast lots upon thy seamless coat: (those poor spoils cannot so much enrich them as glorify thee, whose Scriptures are fulfilled by their barbarous sortitions.) The Jews sue to have thy bones divided; but they sue in vain. No more could thy garments be whole, than thy body could be broken. One inviolable decree overrules both.

Foolish executioners! ye look up at that crucified body, as if it were altogether in your power and mercy; nothing appears to you but impotence and death: little do you know what an irresistible guard there is upon that sacred corpse; such, as if all the powers of darkness shall band against, they shall find themselves confounded. In spite of all the gates of hell, that word shall stand, *Not a bone of him shall be broken.*

Still, the infallible decree of the Almighty leads you on to his own ends, through your own ways. Ye saw him already dead whom ye came to despatch: those bones therefore shall be whole which ye had no power to break. But yet, that no piece either of your cruelty or of Divine prediction may remain unsatisfied, He whose bones may not be impaired shall be wounded in his flesh: He whose ghost was yielded up must yield his last blood: *One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water.*

Malice is wont to end with life; here, it overlives it. Cruel man! what means this so late wound? what commission hadst thou for this bloody act? Pilate had given leave to break the bones of the living; he gave no leave to gore the side of the dead; what wicked supererogation is this! what a superfluity of maliciousness! To what purpose did thy spear pierce so many hearts in that one? why wouldst thou kill a dead man?

Methinks the blessed Virgin, and those other passionate associates of hers, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, together with the other of his fellows, the friends and followers of Christ, and especially he that was so ready to draw his sword upon the troop of his Master's apprehenders, should have work enough to contain themselves within the bounds of patience at so savage a stroke. Their sorrow could not choose but turn to indignation, and their hearts could not but rise, as even mine doth now, at so impertinent a villany. How easily could I rave at that rude hand! But, O God, when I look up to thee, and consider how thy holy and wise providence so overrules the most barbarous actions of men, that, besides their will, they turn beneficial, I can at once hate them and bless thee. This very wound hath a mouth to speak the Messiahship of my Saviour and the truth of thy Scripture, *They shall look at him whom they have pierced.*

Behold, now, the second Adam sleeping, and out of his side formed the Mother of the living, the evangelical Church. Behold the Rock, which was smitten, and the waters of life gushed forth. Behold *the fountain, that is set open to the house of David, for sin and for uncleanness:* a fountain, not of water only, but of blood too. O Saviour, by thy water we are washed; by thy blood we are redeemed. Those two sacraments, which thou didst institute alive, flow also from thee dead, as the last memorials of thy love to thy Church: the water of baptism, which is *the laver of regeneration; the blood of the new testament shed for remission of sins:* and these, together with the Spirit that gives life to them both, are the three witnesses on earth whose attestation cannot fail us. O precious and sovereign wound, by which our souls are healed! Into this cleft of the rock let my dove fly and enter, and there safely hide herself from the talons of all the birds of prey.

It could not be but that the death of Christ, contrived and acted at Jerusalem in so solemn a festival, must needs draw a world of beholders. The Romans, the centurion and his band, were there as actors, as supervisors of the execution. Those strangers were no otherwise engaged, than as they that would hold fair correspondence with the citizens where they were engarrisoned. Their freedom from prejudice rendered them more capable of an ingenuous construction of all events. *Now when the centurion and they that were with him that watched Jesus saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, they feared*

greatly, and glorified God, and said, Truly this was the Son of God.

What a marvellous concurrence is here of strong and irrefragable convictions! Meekness in suffering, prayer for his murderers, a faithful resignation of his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father, the sun eclipsed, the heavens darkened, the earth trembling, the graves open, the rocks rent, the veil of the temple torn: who could go less than this, *Truly, this was the Son of God?* He suffers patiently; this is through the power of grace: many good men have done so through his enabling. The frame of nature suffers with him; this is proper to the God of nature, the Son of God.

I wonder not that these men confessed thus: I wonder that any spectator confessed it not. These proofs were enough to fetch all the world upon their knees, and to have made all mankind a convert. But all hearts are not alike: no means can work upon the wilfully obdured. Even after this the soldier pierced that blessed side; and, while pagans relented, Jews continued impenitent.

Yet even of that nation, those beholders whom envy and partiality had not interested in the slaughter were stricken with just astonishment, and smote their breasts, and shook their heads; and by passionate gesture spake what their tongues durst not. How many must there needs be in this universal concourse of them whom he had healed of diseases, or freed from devils, or miraculously fed, or some way obliged in their persons or friends! These, as they were deeply affected with the mortal indignities which were offered to their acknowledged Messiah, so they could not but be ravished with wonder at those powerful demonstrations of the Deity of Him in whom they believed, and strangely distracted in their thoughts, while they compared those sufferings with that omnipotence. As yet their faith and knowledge was but in the bud or in the blade. How could they choose but think, "Were he not the Son of God, how could these things be? And if he were the Son of God, how could he die?" His Resurrection, his Ascension should soon after perfect their belief; but in the mean time their hearts could not but be conflicted with thoughts hard to be reconciled. Howsoever, they glorify God; and stand amazed at the expectation of the issue.

But above all other, O thou blessed virgin, the holy mother of our Lord, how many swords pierced thy soul, while standing close by his cross, thou sawest thy dear Son and Saviour thus

indignly used, thus stripped, thus stretched, thus nailed, thus bleeding, thus dying, thus pierced! How did thy troubled heart now recount what the angel Gabriel had reported to thee from God in the message of thy blessed conception of that Son of God! how didst thou think of the miraculous formation of that thy Divine burden by the power of the Holy Ghost! how didst thou recall those prophecies of Anna and Simeon concerning him, and all those supernatural works of his, the irrefragable proofs of his Godhead! and, laying all these together, with the miserable infirmities of his passion, how wert thou crucified with him! The care that he took for thee in the extremity of his torments could not choose but melt thy heart into sorrow: but O, when in the height of his pain and misery thou heardst him cry out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* what a cold horror possessed thy soul! I cannot now wonder at thy qualms and swoonings: I could rather wonder that thou survivedst so sad an hour. But when, recollecting thyself, thou sawest the heavens to bear a part with thee in thy mourning, and feltest the earth to tremble no less than thyself, and foundest that the dreadful concussion of the whole frame of nature proclaimed the Deity of him that would thus suffer and die, and rememberedst his frequent predictions of drinking this bitter cup, and of being baptized thus in blood; thou beganst to take heart, and to comfort thyself with the assured expectation of the glorious issue. More than once had he foretold thee his victorious resurrection. He who had openly professed Jonas for his type, and had forepromised in three days to raise up the ruined temple of his body, had doubtless given more full intimation unto thee, who hadst so great a share in that sacred body of his. *The just shall live by faith.* Lo, that faith of thine in his ensuing resurrection, and in his triumph over death, gives thee life, and cheers up thy drooping soul, and bids it in an holy confidence to triumph over all thy fears and sorrows; and him, whom thou now seest dead and despised, represents unto thee living, immortal, glorious.

THE RESURRECTION.

Matthew xxviii; Mark xvi; Luke xxiv; John xx.

Grace doth not ever make show where it is. There is much secret riches, both in the earth and sea, which never eye saw. I

never heard any news till now of Joseph of Arimathea: yet was he eminently both rich and wise and good; a worthy, though close disciple of our Saviour. True faith may be wisely reserved, but will not be cowardly. Now he puts forth himself, and dares beg the body of Jesus.

Death is wont to end all quarrels. Pilate's heart tells him he hath done too much already in sentencing an innocent to death. No doubt that centurion had related unto him the miraculous symptoms of that passion. He, that so unwillingly condemned innocence, could rather have wished that just man alive, than have denied him dead.

The body is yielded and taken down; and now, that which hung naked upon the cross is wrapped in fine linen; that which was soiled with sweat and blood is curiously washed and embalmed.

Now, even Nicodemus comes in for a part, and fears not the envy of a good profession: death hath let that man loose whom the law formerly overawed with restraint. He hates to be a night-bird any longer, but boldly flies forth, and looks upon the face of the sun; and will be now as liberal in his odours as he was before niggardly in his confession.

O Saviour, the earth was thine and the fulness of it; yet, as thou hadst not an house of thine own while thou livedst, so thou hadst not a grave when thou wert dead. Joseph, that rich councillor, lent thee his; lent it so as it should never be restored. Thou tookest it up but for a while; but that little touch of that sacred corpse of thine made it too good for the owner.

O happy Joseph, that hadst the honour to be landlord of the Lord of life! How well is thy houseroom repaid with a *mansion not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!* Thy garden and thy tomb were hard by Calvary, where thou couldst not fail of many monitions of thy frailty. How oft hadst thou seasoned that new tomb with sad and savoury meditations! and hadst oft said within thyself, "Here I shall once lie down to my last rest, and wait for my resurrection!" Little didst thou then think to have been disappointed by so blessed a Guest; or that thy grave should be again so soon empty, and in that emptiness uncapable of any mortal indweller. How gladly dost thou now resign thy grave to Him in whom thou livest, and who liveth for ever; whose soul is in Paradise, whose Godhead everywhere! Hadst thou not been rich before, this gift had enriched thee alone; and more ennobled

thee than all thine earthly honour. Now great princes envy thy bounty, and have thought themselves happy to kiss the stones of that rock which thou thus hewedst, thus bestowedst.

Thus, purely wrapped and sweetly embalmed, lies the precious body of our Saviour in Joseph's new vault. Are ye now also at rest, O ye Jewish rulers? Is your malice dead and buried with him? Hath Pilate enough served your envy and revenge? Surely, it is but a common hostility that can die; yours surviveth death, and puts you upon a further project. *The chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that this deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure till the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say to the people, He is risen.*

How full of terrors and inevitable perplexities is guiltiness! These men were not more troubled with envy at Christ alive, than now with fear of his resurrection. And what can now secure them? Pilate had helped to kill him; but who shall keep him from rising?

Wicked and foolish Jews! how fain would ye fight against God and your own hearts! how gladly would ye deceive yourselves in believing him to be a deceiver whom your consciences knew to be no less true than powerful! Lazarus was still in your eye. That man was no phantasm: his death, his reviving, was undeniable. The so fresh resuscitation of that dead body, after four days' dissolution, was a manifest conviction of omnipotence. How do ye vainly wish that he could deceive you in the forereporting of his own resurrection! Without a Divine power, he could have raised neither Lazarus nor himself; with and by it he could as well raise himself as Lazarus. What need we other witnesses than your own mouths? That which he would do, ye confess he foretold; that the truth of his word might answer the power of this deed, and both of them might argue him the God of truth and power, and yourselves enemies to both.

And now, what must be done! The sepulchre must be secured, and you with it. An huge stone, a strong guard, must do the deed; and that stone must be sealed, that guard of your own designing. Methinks I hear the soldiers and busy officers, when they were rolling that other weighty stone (for such we probably conceive) to the mouth of the vault with much toil and sweat and

breathlessness, how they bragged of the sureness of the place and unremovableness of that load; and when that so choice a watch was set, how they boasted of their valour and vigilance, and said, they would make him safe from either rising or stealing.

O the madness of impotent men, that think by either wile or force to frustrate the will and designs of the Almighty! How justly doth that wise and powerful Arbiter of the world laugh them to scorn in heaven, and befool them in their own vain devices! O Saviour, how much evidence had thy resurrection wanted, if these enemies had not been thus maliciously provident! how irrefragable is thy rising made by these bootless endeavours of their prevention!

All this while the devout Maries keep close, and silently spend their sabbath in a mixture of grief and hope. How did they wear out those sad hours in bemoaning themselves each to other! in mutual relations of the patient sufferings, of the happy expiration of their Saviour; of the wonderful events, both in the heavens and earth, that accompanied his crucifixion; of his frequent and clear predictions of his resurrection! And now they have gladly agreed, so soon as the time will give them leave, in the dawning of the Sunday morning, to visit that dear sepulchre.

Neither will they go empty-handed: she, that had bestowed that costly alabaster box of ointment upon their Saviour alive, hath prepared no less precious odours for him dead.

Love is restless and fearless. In the dark of night these good women go to buy their spices; and, ere the day break, are gone out of their houses towards the tomb of Christ to bestow them. This sex is commonly fearful: it was much for them to walk alone in that unsafe season: yet, as despising all fears and dangers, they thus spend the night after their sabbath. Might they have been allowed to buy their perfumes on the sabbath, or to have visited that holy tomb sooner, can we think they would have stayed so long? can we suppose they would have cared more for the sabbath than for the *Lord of the sabbath,* who now kept his sabbath in the grave? Sooner they might not come, later they would not, to present their last homage to their dead Saviour. Had these holy women known their Jesus to be alive, how had they hasted, who made such speed to do their last offices to his sacred corpse? For us, we *know that our Redeemer liveth;* we know where he is. O Saviour, how cold and heart-

less is our love to thee, if we do not haste to find thee in thy word and sacraments; if our souls do not fly up to thee in all holy affections into thy heaven!

Of all the women, Mary Magdalen is first named; and, in some evangelists, alone. She is noted above her fellows. None of them were so much obliged, none so zealously thankful. Seven devils were cast out of her by the command of Christ. That heart, which was freed from Satan by that powerful dispossession, was now possessed with a free and gracious bounty to her Deliverer. Twice, at the least, hath she poured out her fragrant and costly odours upon him. Where there is a true sense of favour and beneficence, there cannot but be a fervent desire of retribution. O blessed Saviour, could we feel the danger of every sin, and the malignity of those spiritual possessions from which thou hast freed us, how should we pour out ourselves into thankfulness unto thee!

Every thing here had horror. The place, both solitary and a sepulchre; nature abhors, as the visage, so the region of death and corruption: the time, night; only the moon gave them some faint glimmering; for this being the seventeenth day of her age, afforded some light to the latter part of the night: the business, the visitation of a dead corpse. Their zealous love hath easily overcome all these. They had followed him in his sufferings, when the disciples had left him; they attended him to his cross weeping; they followed him to his grave, and saw how Joseph laid him: even there they leave him not; but, ere it be daylight, return to pay him the last tribute of their duty. How much *stronger is love than death!* O blessed Jesu, why should not we imitate thy love to us? Those *whom thou lovest, thou lovest to the end;* yea, in it; yea, after it; even when we are dead, not our souls only, but our very dust is dearly respected of thee. What condition of thine should remove our affections from thy person in heaven, from thy limbs on earth?

Well did these worthy women know what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done to thee. They saw how curiously they had wrapped thee, how preciously they had embalmed thee: yet, as not thinking others' beneficence could be any just excuse of theirs, they bring their own odours to thy sepulture, to be perfumed by the touch of thy sacred body. What thank is it to us that others are obsequious to thee, while we are slack or niggardly? We may rejoice in others' forwardness; but if we rest

in it, how small joy shall it be to us to see them go to heaven without us!

When, on the Friday evening, they attended Joseph to the entombing of Jesus, they marked the place; they marked the passage; they marked that inner gravestone which the owner had fitted to the mouth of that tomb, which all their care is now to remove; *Who shall roll away the stone?* That other more weighty load wherewith the vault was barred, the seal, the guard set upon both, came not perhaps into their knowledge. This was the private plot of Pilate and the priests, beyond the reach of their thoughts.

I do not hear them say, "How shall we recover the charges of our odours?" or, "How shall we avoid the envy and censure of our angry elders, for honouring him whom the governors of our nation have thought worthy of condemnation?" The only thought they now take is, *Who shall roll away the stone?* Neither do they stay at home, and move this doubt; but when they are well forward on their way, resolving to try the issue. Good hearts cannot be so solicitous for anything under heaven as for removing those impediments which lie between them and their Saviour. O blessed Jesu, thou, who art clearly revealed in heaven, art yet still both hid and sealed up from too many here on earth: neither is it some thin veil that is spread between thee and them, but an huge stone; even a true stone of offence lies rolled upon the mouth of their hearts. Yea, if a second weight were superadded to thy grave here, no less than three spiritual bars are interposed betwixt them and thee above; idleness, ignorance, unbelief. Who shall roll away these stones, but the same power that removed thine? O Lord, remove that our ignorance, that we may know thee; our idleness, that we may seek thee; our unbelief, that we may find and enjoy thee.

How well it succeeds when we go faithfully and conscionably about our work, and leave the issue to God! Lo, now God hath removed the cares of these holy women, together with the gravestone. To the wicked, that falls out which they feared; to the godly, that which they wished and cared for, yea more. Holy cares ever prove well, the worldly dry the bones and disappoint the hopes.

Could these good visitants have known of a greater stone sealed, of a strong watch set, their doubts had been doubled: now God goes beyond their thoughts, and at once removes that which both

they did and might have feared. The stone is removed, the seal broken, the watch fled.

What a scorn doth the Almighty God make of the impotent designs of men! They thought, "the stone shall make the grave sure, the seal shall make the stone sure, the guard shall make both sure:" now, when they think all safe, God sends an angel from heaven above, the earth quakes beneath, the stone rolls away, the soldiers stand like carcasses, and when they have got heart enough to run away, think themselves valiant; the tomb is opened, Christ is risen, they confounded. O the vain projects of silly men! as if, with one shovelful of mire they would dam up the sea, or with a clout hanged forth they would keep the sun from shining. O these spiders' webs, or houses of cards which fond children have, as they think, skilfully framed, which the least breath breaks and ruins! Who are we, sorry worms, that we should look in any business to prevail against our Creator? What creature is so base that he cannot arm against us to our confusion? The lice and frogs shall be too strong for Pharaoh, the worms for Herod: *There is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord.*

O the marvellous pomp and magnificence of our Saviour's resurrection! The earth quakes, the angel appears; that it may be plainly seen that this Divine Person now rising had the command both of earth and heaven. At the dissolution of thine human nature, O Saviour, was an earthquake; at the reuniting of it is an earthquake; to tell the world that the God of nature then suffered, and had now conquered. While thou layest still in the earth, the earth was still; when thou camest to fetch thine own, *the earth trembled at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.* When thou, our true Samson, awakedst, and foundest thyself tied with these Philistine cords, and rousedst up and brakest those hard and strong twists with a sudden power, no marvel if the room shook under thee.

Good cause had the earth to quake, when the God that made it powerfully calls for his own flesh from the usurpation of her bowels. Good cause had she to open her graves and yield up her dead in attendance to the Lord of life, whom she had presumed to detain in that cell of her darkness.

What a seeming impotence was here, that thou, who art the true Rock of thy Church, shouldest lie obscurely shrouded in Joseph's rock! thou, that art the true Cornerstone of thy Church, shouldest be shut up with a double stone, the one of thy grave,

the other of thy vault! thou, *by whom we are sealed to the day of our redemption*, shouldest be sealed up in a blind cavern of earth! But now, what a demonstration of power doth both the world and I see in thy glorious resurrection! The rocks tear, the graves open, the stones roll away, the dead rise and appear, the soldiers flee and tremble, saints and angels attend thy rising. O Saviour, thou layest down in weakness, thou risest in power and glory; thou layest down like a man, thou risest like a God.

What a lively image hast thou herein given me of the dreadful majesty of the general resurrection and thy second appearance! Then, not the earth only, but *the powers of heaven shall be shaken;* not some few graves shall be open, and some saints appear, but all the bars of death shall be broken, and *all that sleep in their graves shall awake, and stand up from the dead* before thee: not some one angel shall descend, but thou, *the great Angel of the Covenant*, attended with thousand thousands of those mighty spirits. And if these stout soldiers were so filled with terror at the feeling of an earthquake and the sight of an angel, that they had scarce breath left in them for the time to witness them alive, where shall thine enemies appear, O Lord, in the day of thy terrible appearance, when the earth shall reel and vanish, and the elements shall be on a flame about their ears, and the heavens shall wrap up as a scroll?

O God, thou mightest have removed this stone by the force of thine earthquake as well as rive other rocks, yet thou wouldest rather use the ministry of an angel: or, thou that gavest thyself life, and gavest being both to the stone and to the earth, couldest more easily have removed the stone than moved the earth: but it was thy pleasure to make use of an angel's hand. And now, he that would ask why thou wouldest do it rather by an angel than by thyself, may as well ask why thou didst not rather give thy Law by thine own immediate hand, than by the ministration of angels; why by an angel thou struckest the Israelites with plagues, the Assyrians with a sword; why an angel appeared to comfort thee after thy temptation and agony, when thou wert able to comfort thyself; why thou usest the influences of heaven to fruiten the earth; why thou employest second causes in all events, when thou couldest do all things alone. It is good reason thou shouldst serve thyself of thine own; neither is there any ground to be required, whether of their motion or rest, besides thy will.

Thou didst raise thyself; the angels removed the stone. They

that could have no hand in thy resurrection, yet shall have an hand in removing outward impediments; not because thou needest, but because thou wouldest: like as thou alone didst raise Lazarus; thou badest others let him loose. Works of omnipotency thou reservest to thine own immediate performance; ordinary actions thou doest by subordinate means.

Although this act of the angels was not merely with respect to thee, but partly to those devout women, to ease them of their care, to manifest unto them thy resurrection; so officious are those glorious spirits, not only to thee their Maker, but even to the meanest of thy servants, especially in the furtherance of all their spiritual designs. Let us bring our odours; they will be sure to roll away the stone. Why do not we imitate them in our forwardness to promote each other's salvation? We pray to do thy will here, as they do in heaven: if we do not act our wishes, we do but mock thee in our devotions.

How glorious did this angel of thine appear! The terrified soldiers saw his face like lightning; both they and the women saw his garments shining, bright, and white as snow: such a presence became his errand. It was fit that, as in thy Passion the sun was darkened, and all creatures were clad with heaviness, so in thy Resurrection the best of thy creatures should testify their joy and exultation in the brightness of their habit; that, as we on festival days put on our best clothes, so thine angels should celebrate this blessed festivity with a meet representation of glory.

They could not but enjoy our joy, to see the work of man's redemption thus fully finished; and, if there be mirth in heaven at the conversion of one sinner, how much more when a world of sinners is perfectly ransomed from death and restored to salvation! Certainly, if but one or two appeared, all rejoiced, all triumphed.

Neither could they but be herein sensible of their own happy advantage, who, by thy mediation, are confirmed in their glorious estate; since thou, by the blood of thy Cross and power of thy Resurrection, hast reconciled things, not in earth only, but in heaven.

But, above all other, the love of thee their God and Saviour must needs heighten their joy, and make thy glory theirs. It is their perpetual work to praise thee: how much more now, when such an occasion was offered as never had been since the world

began, never could be after? when thou, the God of spirits, hadst vanquished all the spiritual powers of darkness; when thou, the Lord of life, hadst conquered death for thee and all thine, so as they may now boldly insult over their last enemy, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Certainly, if heaven can be capable of an increase of joy and felicity, never had those blessed spirits so great a cause of triumph and gratulation as in this day of thy glorious resurrection. How much more, O dear Jesu, should we men, whose flesh thou didst assume, unite, revive, for whose sake and in whose stead thou didst vouchsafe to suffer and die, whose arrearages thou payedst in death and acquittedst in thy resurrection, whose souls are discharged, whose bodies shall be raised by the power of thy rising; how much more should we think we have cause to be overjoyed with the happy memory of this great work of thy Divine power and unconceivable mercy!

Lo now, how weak soever I am in myself, yet, in the confidence of this victorious resurrection of my Saviour, I dare boldly challenge and defy you, O all ye adverse powers. Do the worst ye can to my soul; in despite of you, it shall be safe.

Is it sin that threats me? Behold, this resurrection of my Redeemer publishes my discharge. My Surety was arrested, and cast into the prison of his grave. Had not the utmost farthing of mine arrearages been paid, he could not have come forth. He is come forth: the sum is fully satisfied. What danger can there be of a discharged debt?

Is it the wrath of God? Wherefore is that, but for sin? If my sin be defrayed, that quarrel is at an end; and if my Saviour suffered it for me, how can I fear to suffer it in myself? That infinite Justice hates to be twice paid. He is risen; therefore he hath satisfied; *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen.*

Is it death itself? Lo, my Saviour, that overcame death by dying, hath triumphed over him in his resurrection. How can I now fear a conquered enemy? What harm is there in the serpent, but for his sting? *The sting of death is sin;* that is pulled out by my powerful Redeemer; it cannot now hurt me; it may refresh me to carry this cool snake in my bosom.

O then, my dear Saviour, I bless thee for thy death; but I bless thee more for thy resurrection. That was a work of wonderful humility, of infinite mercy; this was a work of infinite

power: in that was human weakness; in this, Divine omnipotence: in that, thou didst *die for our sins;* in this, thou didst *rise again for our justification.*

And now, how am I conformable to thee, if, when thou art risen, I lie still in the grave of my corruptions? How am I a limb of thy body, if, while thou hast that perfect dominion over death, death hath dominion over me; if, while thou art alive and glorious, I lie rotting in the dust of death? I know the locomotive faculty is in the head: by the power of the resurrection of thee our Head, all we thy members cannot but be raised. As the earth cannot hold my body from thee in the day of the second resurrection, so cannot sin withhold my soul from thee in the first. How am I thine, if I be not risen? and *if* I *be risen with* thee, why do I not *seek the things above, where* thou *sittest at the right hand of God?*

The vault or cave which Joseph had hewn out of the rock was large, capable of no less than ten persons. Upon the mouth of it, eastward, was that great stone rolled. Within it, at the right hand, in the north part of the cave, was hewn out a receptacle for the body, three handfuls high from the pavement, and a stone was accordingly fitted for the cover of that grave.

Into this cave the good women, finding the stone rolled away, descended to seek the body of Christ, and in it saw the angels. This was the goal to which Peter and John ran, finding the spoils of death, the graveclothes wrapped up, and the napkin that was about the head folded up together, and laid in a place by itself; and as they came in haste, so they returned with wonder.

I marvel not at your speed, O ye blessed disciples, if upon the report of the women ye ran, yea flew upon the wings of zeal, to see what was become of your Master. Ye had wont to walk familiarly together in the attendance of your Lord: now society is forgotten; and, as for a wager, each tries the speed of his legs, and, with neglect of other, vies who shall be first at the tomb.

Who would not but have tried masteries with you in this case, and have made light touches of the earth, to have held paces with you? Your desire was equal: but John is the younger; his limbs are more nimble, his breath more free. He first looks into the sepulchre, but Peter goes down first. O happy competition, who shall be more zealous in the inquiry after Christ!

Ye saw enough to amaze you; not enough to settle your faith.

How well might you have thought, "Our Master is not subduced, but risen. Had he been taken away by others' hands, this fine linen had not been left behind: had he not himself risen from this bed of earth, he had not thus wrapped up his night clothes, and laid them sorted by themselves. What can we doubt, when he foretold us he would rise?" O blessed Jesu, how wilt thou pardon our errors; how should we pardon and pity the errors of each other in lesser occasions; when as yet thy prime and dearest disciples, after so much divine instruction, *knew not the Scriptures, that* thou *must rise again from the dead!* They went away more astonished than confident; more full of wonder, as yet, than of belief.

There is more strength of zeal, where it takes, in the weaker sex. Those holy women, as they came first, so they stayed last: especially devout Mary Magdalen stands still at the mouth of the cave, weeping. Well might those tears have been spared, if her knowledge had been answerable to her affection, her faith to her fervour. Withal, as our eye will be where we love, she stoops, and looks down into that dear sepulchre.

Holy desires never but speed well. There she *sees two* glorious *angels, the one* sitting *at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.* Their shining brightness showed them to be no mortal creatures: besides that Peter and John had but newly come out of the sepulchre, and both found and left it empty in her sight, which was now suddenly filled with those celestial guests. That white linen, wherewith Joseph had shrouded the sacred body of Jesus, was now shamed with a brighter whiteness.

Yet do I not find the good woman aught appalled with that unexpected glory. So was her heart taken up with the thought for her Saviour, that she seemed not sensible of whatsoever other objects. Those tears which she did let drop into the sepulchre send up back to her the voice of those angels; *Woman, why weepest thou?* God and his angels take notice of every tear of our devotion. The sudden wonder hath not dried her eyes nor charmed her tongue: she freely confesseth the cause of her grief to be the missing of her Saviour; *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* Alas, good Mary, how dost thou lose thy tears! Of whom dost thou complain, but of thy best friend? Who hath removed thy Lord, but himself? who, but his own Deity, hath taken away that hu-

man body out of that region of death? Neither is he now laid any more; he stands by thee, whose removal thou complainest of? Thus many a tender and humbled soul afflicts itself with the want of that Saviour whom it hath, and feeleth not.

Sense may be no judge of the bewailed absence of Christ. Do but turn back thine eye, O thou religious soul, *and see Jesus standing by thee, though thou knewest not that it was Jesus.* His habit was not his own. Sometimes it pleases our Saviour to appear unto his not like himself: his holy disguises are our trials. Sometimes he will seem a stranger; sometimes an enemy. Sometimes he offers himself to us in the shape of a poor man; sometimes of a distressed captive. Happy is he that can discern his Saviour in all forms.

Mary took him for a gardener. Devout Magdalen, thou art not so much mistaken. As it was the trade of the first Adam to dress the garden of Eden, so was it the trade of the second to tend the garden of his Church. He digs up the soil by seasonable afflictions; he sows in it the seeds of grace; he plants it with gracious motions; he waters it with his word, yea, with his own blood; he weeds it by wholesome censures. O blessed Saviour, what is it that thou neglectest to do for this selected enclosure of thy Church? As, in some respect, thou art *the true Vine, and* thy *Father the Husbandman;* so also, in some other, we are the vine, and thou art the Husbandman. O be thou such to me as thou appearedst unto Magdalen: break up the fallows of my nature; implant me with grace; prune me with meet corrections; bedew me with the former and latter rain: do what thou wilt to make me fruitful.

Still the good woman weeps, and still complains; and passionately inquires of thee, O Saviour, for thyself. How apt are we, if thou dost never so little vary from our apprehensions, to misknow thee, and to wrong ourselves by our misopinions!

All this while hast thou concealed thyself from thine affectionate client; thou sawest her tears, and heardest her importunities and inquiries: at last, as it was with Joseph, that he could no longer contain himself from the notice of his brethren, thy compassion causes thee to break forth into a clear expression of thyself, by expressing her name unto herself, *Mary.* She was used, as to the name, so to the sound, to the accent. Thou spakest to her before, but in the tone of a stranger; now of a friend, of a Master. Like a good Shepherd, *thou callest thy sheep by their name, and they*

know thy voice. What was thy call of her, but a clear pattern of our vocation?

As her, so thou callest us; first, familiarly, effectually. She could not begin with thee otherwise than in the compellation of a stranger; it was thy mercy to begin with her. That correction of thy Spirit is sweet and useful; *Now, after ye have known God, or rather are known of him.* We do know thee, O God; but our active knowledge is after our passive: first, we are known of thee, then we know thee that knewest us. And, as our knowledge, so is our calling, so is our election: thou beginnest to us in all; and most justly sayest, *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.* When thou wouldest speak to this devout client as a stranger, thou spakest aloof; *Woman, whom seekest thou?* Now, when thou wouldest be known to her, thou callest her by her name, *Mary.* General invitations and common mercies are for us as men, but where thou givest grace, as to thine elect, thou comest close to the soul, and winnest us with dear and particular intimations.

That very name did as much as say, "Know him of whom thou art known and beloved;" and turns her about to thy view and acknowledgment; *She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.* Before, her face was towards the angels: this word fetches her about, and turns her face to thee, from whom her misprision had averted it. We do not rightly apprehend thee, O Saviour, if any creature in heaven or earth can keep our eyes and our hearts from thee. The angels were bright and glorious; thy appearance was homely, thy habit mean: yet, when she heard thy voice, she turns her back upon the angels, and salutes thee with a *Rabboni;* and falls down before thee, in a desire of an humble amplexation of those sacred feet, which she now rejoices to see past the use of her odours.

Where there was such familiarity in the mutual compellation, what means such strangeness in the charge; *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father?* Thou wert not wont, O Saviour, to make so dainty of being touched. It is not long since these very same hands touched thee in thine anointing; the bloody-fluxed woman touched thee; the thankful penitent in Simon's house touched thee. What speak I of these? The multitude touched thee; the executioners touched thee; and, even after thy resurrection, thou didst not stick to say to thy disciples, *Touch me and see,* and to invite Thomas to put his fingers into thy side: neither is it long after this, before thou sufferest the three Maries

to touch and hold thy feet. How then sayest thou, *Touch me not?* Was it in a mild taxation of her mistaking? as if thou hadst said, "Thou knowest not that I have now an immortal body; but so demeanest thyself towards me, as if I were still in my wonted condition; know now that the case is altered: howsoever indeed I have not yet ascended to my Father, yet this body of mine, which thou seest to be real and sensible, is now impassible, and qualified with immortality, and therefore worthy of a more awful veneration than heretofore." Or was it a gentle reproof of her dwelling too long in this dear hold of thee, and fixing her thoughts upon thy bodily presence; together with an implied direction of reserving the height of her affection for thy perfect glorification in heaven? Or, lastly, was it a light touch of her too much haste and eagerness in touching thee; as if she must use this speed in preventing thine ascension, or else be endangered to be disappointed of her hopes? As if thou hadst said, "Be not so passionately forward and sudden in laying hold on me, as if I were instantly ascending; but know, that I shall stay some time with you upon earth, before my going up to my Father." O Saviour, even our well-meant zeal in seeking and enjoying thee may be faulty; if we seek thee where we should not, on earth; how we should not, unwarrantably. There may be a kind of carnality in spiritual actions: *If we have heretofore known thee after the flesh, henceforth know we thee so no more.* That thou livedst here in this shape, that colour, this stature, that habit, I should be glad to know: nothing that concerns thee can be unuseful. Could I say, "Here thou satest; here thou layest; here and thus thou wert crucified; here buried; here settest thy last foot;" I should with much contentment see and recount these memorials of thy presence; but if I shall so fasten my thoughts upon these, as not to look higher, to the spiritual part of thine achievements, to the power and issue of thy resurrection, I am never the better.

No sooner art thou risen than thou speakest of ascending; as thou didst lie down to rise, so didst thou rise to ascend: that is the consummation of thy glory, and ours in thee. Thou that forbadest her touch, enjoinedst her errand; *Go to my brethren, and say, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

The annunciation of thy resurrection and ascension is more than a private fruition: this is for the comfort of one, that for the benefit of many. To sit still and enjoy, is more sweet for the

present; but to go and tell, is more gainful in the sequel. That great angel thought himself, as he well might, highly honoured, in that he was appointed to carry the happy news unto the blessed virgin, thy holy mother, of her conception of thee her Saviour: how honourable must it needs be to Mary Magdalen, that she must be the messenger of thy second birth, thy resurrection and instant ascension! *How beautiful* do *the feet of those* deserve to be *who bring the glad tidings of peace* and salvation! What matter is it, O Lord, if men despise where thou wilt honour?

To whom then dost thou send her? *Go, tell my brethren.* Blessed Jesu, who are those? Were they not thy followers? yea, were they not thy forsakers? Yet still thou stylest them thy *brethren.* O admirable humility! O infinite mercy! How dost thou raise their titles with thyself! At first they were thy servants; then disciples; a little before thy death they were thy friends; now, after thy resurrection, they were thy brethren. Thou, that wert exalted infinitely higher from mortal to immortal, descendest so much lower to call them brethren who were before friends, disciples, servants. What do we stand upon terms of our poor inequality, when the Son of God stoops so low as to call us brethren? But, O mercy without measure! why wilt thou, how canst thou, O Saviour, call them brethren, whom in their last parting thou foundest fugitives? Did they not run from thee? Did not one of them rather leave his inmost coat behind him than not be quit of thee? Did not another of them deny thee, yea, abjure thee? And yet thou sayest, *Go, tell my brethren.* It is not in the power of the sins of our infirmity to unbrother us: when we look at the acts themselves, they are heinous; when at the persons, they are so much more faulty as more obliged; but when we look at the mercy of thee who hast called us, now, *Who shall separate us?* When we have sinned, thy dearness hath reason to aggravate our sorrows; but when we have sorrowed, our faith hath no less reason to uphold us from despairing; even yet we are brethren; brethren in thee, O Saviour, who art ascending for us; in thee, who hast made thy Father ours, thy God our God. He is thy Father by eternal generation; our Father by his gracious adoption: thy God by unity of essence; our God by his grace and election.

It is this propriety [property] wherein our life and happiness consisteth. They are weak comforts that can be raised from the

apprehension of thy general mercies. What were I the better, O Saviour, that God were thy Father, if he be not mine? O do thou give me a particular sense of my interest in thee and thy goodness to me. Bring thou thyself home to me; and let me find that I have a God and Saviour of my own.

It is fit I should mark thy order; first, *my Father*, then *yours*. Even so, Lord, He is first thine; and, in thine only right, ours. It is in thee that we are adopted; it is in thee that we are elected: without thee, God is not only a stranger, but an enemy to us. Thou only canst make us free; thou only canst make us sons. Let me be found in thee, and I cannot fail of a Father in heaven.

With what joy did Mary receive this errand! with what joy did the disciples welcome it from her! Here was good news from a far country! even as far as the utmost regions of death.

Those disciples whose flight scattered them upon their Master's apprehension are now, at night, like a dispersed covey met together by their mutual call: their assembly is secret; when the light was shut in, *when the doors were shut* up. Still were they fearful; still were the Jews malicious. The assured tidings of their Master's resurrection and life have filled their hearts with joy and wonder. While their thoughts and speech are taken up with so happy a subject, his miraculous and sudden presence bids their senses be witnesses of his reviving and their happiness: *When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*

O Saviour, how thou camest in thither I wonder; I inquire not: I know not what a glorified body can do; I know there is nothing that thou canst not do. Had not thine entrance been recorded for strange and supernatural, why was thy standing in the midst noted before thy passage into the room? Why were the doors said to be shut while thou camest in? Why were thy disciples amazed to see thee ere they heard thee! Doubtless, they that once before took thee for a spirit, when thou didst walk upon the waters, could not but be astonished to see thee, while the doors were barred, without any noise of thine entrance, to stand in the midst: well might they think thou couldst not thus be there, if thou wert not the God of spirits.

There might seem more scruple of thy reality than of thy power: and therefore, after thy wonted greeting, thou showest

them thy hands and thy feet, stamped with the impressions of thy late sufferings. Thy respiration shall argue the truth of thy life. Thou breathest on them as a man; thou givest them thy Spirit as a God; and, as God and man, thou sendest them on the great errand of thy gospel.

All the mists of their doubts are now dispelled, the sun breaks out clear: *They were glad when they had seen the Lord.* Had they known thee for no other than a mere man, this reappearance could not but have affrighted them; since, till now by thine almighty power, this was never done, that the long-since dead rose out of their graves and appeared unto many: but when they recounted the miraculous works that thou hadst done, and thought of Lazarus so lately raised, thine approved Deity gave them confidence, and thy presence joy.

We cannot but be losers by our absence from holy assemblies. Where wert thou, O Thomas, when the rest of that sacred family were met together? Had thy fear put thee to so long a flight, that as yet thou wert not returned to thy fellows? or didst thou suffer other occasions to detain thee from this happiness? Now, for the time, thou missedst that divine breath which so comfortably inspired the rest; now, thou art suffered to fall into that weak distrust which thy presence had prevented. They told thee, *We have seen the Lord;* was not this enough? Would no eyes serve thee but thine own? were thy ears to no use for thy faith? *Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.* Suspicious man, who is the worse for that? Whose is the loss, if thou believe not? Is there no certainty but in thine own senses? Why were not so many and so holy eyes and tongues as credible as thine own hands and eyes? How little wert thou yet acquainted with the ways of faith? *Faith comes by hearing.* These are the tongues that must win the whole world to an assent; and dost thou, the first man, detrect to yield? Why was that word so hard to pass? Had not that thy divine Master foretold thee, with the rest, that he must be crucified, and the third day rise again? Is any thing related to be done but that which was forepromised? any thing beyond the sphere of Divine Omnipotence? Go then, and please thyself in thine overwise incredulity, while thy fellows are happy in believing.

It is a whole week that Thomas rests in this sullen unbelief; in all which time, doubtless, his ears were beaten with the many

constant assertions of the holy women, the first witnesses of the resurrection, as also of the two disciples walking to Emmaus, whose hearts burning within them had set their tongues on fire in a zealous relation of those happy occurrences, with the assured reports of the rising and reappearance of many saints in attendance of the Lord and Giver of life: yet still he struggles with his own distrust, and stiffly suspends his belief to that truth whereof he cannot deny himself enough convinced. As all bodies are not equally apt to be wrought upon by the same medicine, so are not all souls by the same means of faith; one is refractory, while others are pliable.

O Saviour, how justly mightest thou have left this man to his own pertinacy! Whom could he have thanked if he had perished in his unbelief? But, O thou good Shepherd of Israel, that couldst be content to leave the ninety and nine to go fetch one stray in the wilderness, how careful wert thou to reduce this straggler to his fellows! Right so were thy disciples reassembled, such was the season, the place the same, so were the doors shut up, when, that unbelieving disciple being now present with the rest, thou so camest in, so stoodst in the midst, so showedst thy hands and feet; and, singling out thy incredulous client, invitedst his eyes to see, and his fingers to handle thy hands, and his hand to be thrust into thy side, that he might not be faithless but faithful.

Blessed Jesu, how thou pitiest the errors and infirmities of thy servants! Even when we are froward in our misconceits, and worthy of nothing but desertion, how thou followest us, and overtakest us with mercy, and in thine abundant compassion wilt reclaim and save us, when either we meant not or would not! By how much more unworthy those eyes and hands were to see and touch that immortal and glorious body; by so much more wonderful was thy goodness in condescending to satisfy that curious infidelity.

Neither do I hear thee so much as to chide that weak obstinacy. It was not long since thou didst sharply take up the two disciples that did walk to Emmaus, *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!* but this was under the disguise of an unknown traveller upon the way, when they were alone: now thou speakest with thy own tongue before all thy disciples, instead of rebuking, thou only exhortest, *Be not faithless, but faithful.*

Behold, thy mercy, no less than thy power, hath melted the congealed heart of thy unbelieving follower; *Then Thomas an-*

swered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. I do not hear that, when it came to the issue, Thomas employed his hands in this trial. His eyes were now sufficient assurance. The sense of his Master's omniscience, in this particular challenge of him, spared perhaps the labour of a further disquisition. And now, how happily was that doubt bestowed which brought forth so faithful a confession, *My Lord, my God!* I hear not such a word from those that believed. It was well for us, it was well for thee, O Thomas, that thou distrustedst, else neither had the world received so perfect an evidence of the resurrection, whereon all our salvation dependeth; neither hadst thou yielded so pregnant and divine an astipulation to thy blessed Saviour. Now, thou dost not only profess his resurrection, but his Godhead too, and thy happy interest in both. And now, if *they* be *blessed that have not seen and* yet *believed;* blessed art thou also, that, having seen, hast thus believed: and blessed be thou, O God, who knowest how to make advantage of the infirmities of thy chosen, for the promoting of their salvation, the confirmation of thy Church, the glory of thy own name. Amen.

THE ASCENSION.—Acts i.

It stood not with thy purpose, O Saviour, to ascend immediately from the grave into heaven: thou meantest to take the earth in thy way; not for a sudden passage, but for a leisurely conversation. Upon thine Easter-day thou spakest of thine ascension, but thou wouldst have forty days interposed. Hadst thou merely respected thine own glory, thou hadst instantly changed thy grave for thy paradise; for so much the sooner hadst thou been possessed of thy Father's joy; we would not continue in a dungeon when we might be in a palace: but thou, who for our sakes vouchsafedst to descend from heaven to earth, wouldst now, in the upshot, have a gracious regard to us in thy return.

Thy death had troubled the hearts of many disciples, who thought that condition too mean to be compatible with the glory of the Messiah; and thoughts of diffidence were apt to seize upon the holiest breasts. So long therefore wouldst thou hold footing upon earth, till the world were fully convinced of the infallible evidences of thy resurrection; of all which time thou only canst give an account. It was not for flesh and blood to trace the ways

of immortality; neither was our frail, corruptible, sinful nature a meet companion for thy now glorified humanity: the glorious angels of heaven were now thy fittest attendants. But yet, how oft did it please thee graciously to impart thyself this while unto men; and not only to appear unto thy disciples, but to renew unto them the familiar forms of thy wonted conversation, in conferring, walking, eating with them! And now, when thou drewest near to thy last parting, thou, who hadst many times showed thyself before to thy several disciples, thoughtest meet to assemble them all together, for an universal valediction.

Who can be too rigorous in censuring the ignorances of well-meaning Christians when he sees the domestic followers of Christ, even after his resurrection, mistake the main end of his coming in the flesh? *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* They saw their Master now out of the reach of all Jewish envy; they saw his power illimited and irresistible; they saw him stay so long upon earth, that they might imagine he meant to fix his abode there; and what should he do there but reign? and wherefore should they be now assembled, but for the choice and distribution of offices, and for the ordering of the affairs of that state which was now to be vindicated? O weak thoughts of well-instructed disciples! what should an heavenly body do in an earthly throne? how should a spiritual life be employed in secular cares? how poor a business is the temporal kingdom of Israel for the King of heaven!

And even yet, O blessed Saviour, I do not hear thee sharply control this erroneous conceit of thy mistaken followers: thy mild correction insists rather upon the time than the misconceived substance of that restoration. It was thy gracious purpose that thy Spirit should by degrees rectify their judgments and illuminate them with thy Divine truths; in the mean time, it was sufficient to raise up their hearts to an expectation of that Holy Ghost which should shortly lead them into all needful and requisite verities.

And now, with a gracious promise of that Spirit of thine, with a careful charge renewed unto thy disciples for the promulgation of thy gospel, with an heavenly benediction of all thine acclaiming attendance, thou takest leave of the earth; *When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.* O happy parting! fit for the Saviour of mankind, answerable to that divine conversation, to that succeeding glory! O blessed Jesu, let me so far imitate

thee, as to depart hence with a blessing in my mouth. Let my soul, when it is stepping over the threshold of heaven, leave behind it a legacy of peace and happiness.

It was from the Mount of Olives that thou tookest thy rise into heaven. Thou mightest have ascended from the valley; all the globe of earth was alike to thee; but since thou wert to mount upward, thou wouldst take so much advantage as that stair of ground would afford thee; thou wouldst not use the help of a miracle in that wherein nature offered her ordinary service. What difficulty had it been for thee to have styed up from the very centre of earth? But, since thou hast made hills so much nearer unto heaven, thou wouldst not neglect the benefit of thine own creation. Where we have common helps, we may not depend upon supernatural provisions; we may not strain the Divine Providence to the supply of our negligence or the humouring of our presumption. Thou, that couldest always have walked on the sea, wouldest walk so but once, when thou wantedst shipping: thou, to whom the highest mountains were but valleys, wouldest walk up to an hill to ascend thence into heaven. O God, teach me to bless thee for means when I have them, and to trust thee for means when I have them not; yea, to trust to thee without means when I have no hope of them.

What hill was this thou chosest but the Mount of Olives? Thy pulpit shall I call it, or thine oratory? the place from whence thou hadst wont to shower down thine heavenly doctrine upon the hearers; the place where you hadst wont to send up thy prayers to thy heavenly Father; the place that shared with the Temple for both: in the daytime thou wert preaching in the Temple; in the night, praying in the Mount of Olives. On this very hill was the bloody sweat of thine agony; now is it the mount of thy triumph. From this Mount of Olives did flow that oil of gladness wherewith thy Church is everlastingly refreshed. That God, that uses to punish us in the same kind wherein we have offended, retributes also to us in the same kind and circumstances wherein we have been afflicted. To us also, O Saviour, even to us, thy unworthy members, dost thou seasonably vouchsafe to give a proportionable joy to our heaviness, laughter to our mourning, glory to contempt and shame. Our agonies shall be answered with exaltation

Whither then, O blessed Jesu, whither didst thou ascend? whither, but home into thine heaven? From the mountain wert

thou taken up; and what but heaven is above the hills? Lo, these are those mountains of spices which thy Spouse the Church long since desired thee to climb. Thou hast now climbed up that infinite steepness, and hast left all sublimity below thee. Already hadst thou approved thyself the Lord and Commander of earth, of sea, of hell. The earth confest thee her Lord when at thy voice she rendered thee thy Lazarus; when she shook at thy Passion, and gave up her dead saints: the sea acknowledged thee, in that it became a pavement to thy feet, and, at thy command, to the feet of thy disciple; in that it became thy treasury for thy tribute-money: hell found and acknowledged thee, in that thou conqueredst all the powers of darkness; even him that had the power of death, the devil. It now only remained, that, as the Lord of the air, thou shouldest pass through all the regions of that yielding element; and, as Lord of heaven, thou shouldest pass through all the glorious contignations thereof; that so *every knee* might *bow to thee, both in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth.*

Thou hadst an everlasting right to that heaven that should be; an undoubted possession of it ever since it was; yea, even while thou didst cry and sprawl in the cratch, while thou didst hang upon the cross, while thou wert sealed up in thy grave; but thine human nature had not taken actual possession of it till now. Like as it was in thy true type, David, he had right to the kingdom of Israel immediately upon his anointing; but yet, many a hard brunt did he pass ere he had the full possession of it in his ascent to Hebron.

I see now, O blessed Jesu, I see where thou art; even far above all heavens, at the right hand of thy Father's glory. This is the far country into which the nobleman went to receive for himself a kingdom; far off to us, to thee near, yea, intrinsical. O do thou raise up my heart thither to thee. Place thou my affections upon thee above, and teach me therefore to love heaven, because thou art there.

How then, O blessed Saviour, how didst thou ascend? *While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.* So wast thou taken up, as that the act was thy own; the power of the act none but thine. Thou that descendedst wast the same that ascendedst: as in thy descent there was no use of any power or will but thine own, no more was there in thine ascent. Still and ever wert thou the master of thy own acts. Thou laidst down thy own life, no man took it from thee; thou raisedst up

thyself from death, no hand did or could help thee; thou carriedst up thine own glorified flesh, and placedst it in heaven. The angels did attend thee; they did not aid thee: whence had they their strength but from thee? Elias ascended to heaven, but he was fetcht up in a chariot of fire; that it might appear hence that man had need of other helps, who else could not of himself so much as lift up himself to the airy heaven, much less to the empyreal. But thou, our Redeemer, neededst no chariot, no carriage of angels: thou art the Author of life and motion; they move in and from thee. As thou, therefore, didst move thyself upward, so, by the same Divine power, thou wilt raise us up to the participation of thy glory. These *vile bodies shall be made like to thy glorious body, according to the working whereby thou art able to subdue all things unto thyself.*

Elias had but one witness of his rapture into heaven: S. Paul had none, no, not himself; for, *whether in the body or out of the body* he knew not. Thou, O blessed Jesu, wouldst neither have all eyes witnesses of thine ascension, nor yet too few. As, after thy resurrection, thou didst not set thyself upon the pinnacle of the temple, nor yet publicly show thyself within it, as making thy presence too cheap; but madest choice of those eyes whom thou wouldst bless with the sight of thee; thou wert seen indeed of five hundred at once, but they were brethren: so, in thine ascension, thou didst not carry all Jerusalem promiscuously forth with thee to see thy glorious departure, but only that selected company of thy disciples which had attended thee in thy life. Those who immediately upon thine ascending returned to Jerusalem were an hundred and twenty persons: a competent number of witnesses, to verify that thy miraculous and triumphant passage into thy glory. Lo, those only were thought worthy to behold thy majestical ascent, which had been partners with thee in thy humiliation. Still, thou wilt have it thus with us, O Saviour, and we embrace the condition: if we will converse with thee in thy lowly estate here upon earth, wading with thee through contempt and manifold afflictions, we shall be made happy with the sight and communion of thy glory above.

O my soul, be thou now, if ever, ravished with the contemplation of this comfortable and blessed farewell of thy Saviour. What a sight was this, how full of joyful assurance, of spiritual consolation! Methinks I see it still with their eyes, how thou, my glorious Saviour, didst leisurely and insensibly rise up from thine Olivet,

taking leave of thine acclaiming disciples now left below thee, with gracious eyes, with heavenly benedictions. Methinks I see how they followed thee with eager and longing eyes, with arms lifted up, as if they had wished them winged to have soared up after thee. And if Elijah gave assurance to his servant Elisha, that if he should behold him in that rapture, his Master's spirit should be doubled upon him; what an accession of the spirit of joy and confidence must needs be to thy happy disciples in seeing thee thus gradually rising up to thy heaven! O how unwillingly did their intentive eyes let go so blessed an object! how unwelcome was that cloud that interposed itself betwixt thee and them, and, closing up itself, left only a glorious splendour behind it, as the bright tract of thine ascension! Of old, here below, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud: now, afar off in the sky, the cloud intercepted this heavenly glory; if distance did not rather do it than that bright meteor. Their eyes attended thee on thy way so far as their beams would reach: when they could go no farther, the cloud received thee. Lo, yet even that very screen, whereby thou wert taken off from all earthly view, was no other than glorious. How much rather do all the beholders fix their sight upon that cloud than upon the best piece of the firmament! Never was the sun itself gazed on with so much intension. With what long looks, with what astonished acclamations, did these transported beholders follow thee their ascending Saviour! as if they would have looked through that cloud and that heaven that hid thee from them.

But O, what tongue of the highest archangel of heaven can express the welcome of thee, the King of glory, into those blessed regions of immortality? Surely the empyreal heaven never resounded with so much joy: *God ascended with jubilation, and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.* It is not for us, weak and finite creatures, to wish to conceive those incomprehensible, spiritual, divine gratulations, that the glorious Trinity gave to the victorious and now glorified human nature. Certainly, if *when he brought his only begotten Son into the world, he said, Let all the angels worship him;* much more now that he *ascends on high, and hath led captivity captive, hath he given him a name above all names, that at the name of JESUS all knees should bow.* And if the holy angels did so carol at his birth, in the very entrance into that estate of humiliation and infirmity, with what triumph did they receive him now, returning from the perfect

achievement of man's redemption! And if when his type had vanquished Goliath, and carried the head into Jerusalem, the damsels came forth to meet him with dances and timbrels; how shall we think those angelical spirits triumphed in meeting of the great Conqueror of hell and death! how did they sing, *Lift up your heads, ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in!*

Surely, as he shall come, so he went: and, *behold, he shall come with thousands of his holy ones: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand thousands stood before him:* from all whom, methinks, I hear that blessed applause, *Worthy is the Lamb that was killed to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and praise: Praise, and honour, and glory, and power, be to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for evermore.*

And why dost not thou, O my soul, help to bear thy part with that happy quire of heaven? why art not thou rapt out of my bosom with an ecstacy of joy, to see this human nature of ours exalted above all the powers of heaven; adored of angels, archangels, Cherubim, Seraphim, and all those mighty and glorious spirits; and *sitting* there *crowned with infinite glory and majesty?*

Although little would it avail thee that our nature is thus honoured, if the benefit of this ascension did not reflect upon thee. How many are miserable enough in themselves, notwithstanding the glory of their human nature in Christ! None but those that are found in him are the happier by him: who but the members are the better for the glory of the Head? O Saviour, how should our weakness have ever hoped to climb into heaven, if thou hadst not gone before and made way for us? It is for us, that thou, the Forerunner, art entered in. Now thy Church hath her wish; *Draw me and I shall run after thee.* Even so, O blessed Jesu, how ambitiously should we follow thee with the paces of love and faith, and aspire towards thy glory! Thou that art *the way* hast made the way to thyself and us; *Thou didst humble thyself, and becamest obedient to the death, even to the death of the cross. Therefore hath God also highly exalted thee,* and upon the same terms will not fail to advance us. We see thy track before us, of humility and obedience. O teach me to follow thee in the roughest ways of obedience, in the bloody paths of death, that I may at last overtake thee in those high steps of immortality.

Amongst those millions of angels that attended this triumphant ascension of thine, O Saviour, some are appointed to this lower station, to comfort thine astonished disciples, in the certain assurance of thy no less glorious return; *Two men stood by them in white apparel.* They stood by them; they were not of them: they seemed men; they were angels: *Men*, for their familiarity; *two*, for more certainty of testimony; *in white*, for the joy of thine ascension.

The angels formerly celebrated thy nativity with songs; but we do not find they then appeared in white. Thou wert then to undergo much sorrow, many conflicts: it was the vale of tears into which thou wert come down. So soon as thou wert risen, the women saw an angel in the form of a young man, clothed in white; and now, so soon as thou art ascended, *two men clothed in white* stand by thy disciples: thy task was now done, thy victory achieved; and nothing remained but a crown, which was now set upon thy head. Justly, therefore, were those blessed angels suited with the robes of light and joy. And why should our garments be of any other colour? Why should oil be wanting to our heads when the eyes of our faith see thee thus ascended? It is for us, O Saviour, that thou art gone to prepare a place in those celestial mansions; it is for us that thou sittest at the right hand of Majesty. It is a piece of thy divine prayer to thy Father, that *those whom he hath given thee may be with thee.* To every bleeding soul thou sayest still, as thou didst to Peter, *Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me hereafter.* In assured hope of this glory, why do I not rejoice, and beforehand walk in white with thine angels, that at the last I may walk with thee in white?

Little would the presence of these angels have availed, if they had not been heard as well as seen. They stand not silent, therefore; but, directing their speech to the amazed beholders, say, *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven?* What a question was this! Could any of those two hundred and forty eyes have power to turn themselves off to any other object than that cloud and that point of heaven where they left their ascended Saviour? Surely every one of them were so fixed, that had not the speech of these angels called them off, there they had set up their rest till the darkness of night had interposed. Pardon me, O ye blessed angels; had I been there with them, I should also have been unwilling to have had mine eyes

pulled off from that dear prospect, and diverted unto you. Never could they have gazed so happily as now. If but some great man be advanced to honour over our heads, how apt we are to stand at a gaze, and to eye him as some strange meteor! Let the sun but shine a little upon these dials, how are they looked at by all passengers! Yet, alas, what can earthly advancement make us other than we are, dust and ashes; which the higher it is blown the more it is scattered? O how worthy is the King of glory to command our eyes now, in the highest pitch of his heavenly exaltation! Lord, I can never look enough at the place where thou art; but what eye could be satisfied with seeing the way that thou wentest?

It was not the purpose of these angels to check the long looks of these faithful disciples after their ascended Master: it was only a change of eyes that they intended; of carnal, for spiritual; of the eye of sense for the eye of faith. "*This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* Look not after him, O ye weak disciples, as so departed that ye shall see him no more. If he be gone, yet he is not lost. Those heavens that received him shall restore him, neither can those blessed mansions decrease his glory. Ye have seen him ascend upon the chariot of a bright cloud, and in the clouds of heaven ye shall see him descend again to his last judgment. He is gone: can it trouble you to know you have an Advocate in heaven? Strive not now so much to exercise your bodily eyes in looking after him, as the eyes of your souls in looking for him."

Ye cannot, O ye blessed spirits, wish other than well to mankind. How happy a diversion of eyes and thoughts is this that you advise! If it be our sorrow to part with our Saviour, yet to part with him into heaven it is our comfort and felicity; if his absence could be grievous, his return shall be happy and glorious.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. In the mean while, it is not heaven that can keep thee from me; it is not earth that can keep me from thee. Raise thou up my soul to a life of faith with thee; let me ever enjoy thy conversation while I expect thy return.

END OF VOL. II.

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